

eBook

The Baronet's Bride

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The Baronet's Bride

CHAPTER I.

THE BARONET'S BRIDE.

"And there is danger of death---for mother and child?"

"Well, no, Sir Jasper---no, sir; no certain danger, you know; but in these protracted cases it can do no harm, Sir Jasper, for the clergyman to be here. He may not be needed but your good lady is very weak, I am sorry to say, Sir Jasper Kingsland."

"I will send for the clergyman," Sir Jasper Kingsland said. "Do your best, Doctor Godroy, and for God's sake let me know the worst or best as soon as may be. This suspense is horrible."

Doctor Parker Godroy looked sympathetically at him through his gold-bowed spectacles.

"I will do my best, Sir Jasper," he said, gravely. "The result is in the hands of the Great Dispenser of life and death. Send for the clergyman, and wait and hope."

He quitted the library as he spoke. Sir Jasper Kingsland seized the bell and rang a shrill peal.

"Ride to the village---ride for your life!" he said, imperatively, to the servant who answered, "and fetch the Reverend Cyrus Green here at once."

The man bowed and departed, and Sir Jasper Kingsland, Baronet, of Kingsland Court, was alone---alone in the gloomy grandeur of the vast library; alone with his thoughts and the wailing midnight storm.

A little toy time-piece of buhl on the stone mantel chimed musically its story of the hour, and Sir Jasper Kingsland lifted his gloomy eyes for a moment at the sound. A tall, spare middle-aged man, handsome once---handsome still, some people said---with iron-gray hair and a proud, patrician face.

"Twelve," his dry lips whispered to themselves---"midnight, and for three hours I have endured this maddening agony of suspense! Another day is given to the world, and before its close all I love best may be cold and stark in death! Oh, my God! have mercy, and spare her!"

He lifted his clasped hands in passionate appeal. There was a picture opposite---a gem of Raphael's---the Man of Sorrows fainting under the weight of the cross, and the fire's shine playing upon it seemed to light the pallid features with a derisive smile.

"The mercy you showed to others, the same shall be shown to you. Tiger heart, you were merciless in the days gone by. Let your black, bad heart break, as you have broken others!"

No voice had sounded, yet he was answered. Conscience had spoken in trumpet-tones, and with a hollow groan the baronet turned away and began pacing up and down.

It was a large and spacious apartment, this library of Kingsland Court, dimly lighted now by the flickering wood-fire and the mellow glow of a branch of wax-lights. Huge book-cases filled to overflowing lined the four walls, and pictures precious as their weight in rubies looked duskily down from their heavy frames. Busts and bronzes stood on brackets and surmounted doors; a thick, rich carpet of moss-green, sprinkled with oak leaves and acorns, muffled the tread; voluminous draperies of dark green shrouded the tall, narrow windows. The massive chairs and tables, fifty years old at least, were spindle-legged and rich in carving, upholstered in green velvet and quaintly embroidered, by hands moldered to dust long ago. Everything was old and grand, and full of storied interest. And there, on the wall, was the crest of the house---the uplifted hand grasping a dagger---and the motto, in old Norman French, "Strike once, and strike well."

It is a very fine thing to be a baronet---a Kingsland of Kingsland, with fifteen thousand a year, and the finest old house in the county; but if Death will stalk grimly over your threshold and snatch away the life you love more than your own, then even that glory is not omniscient. For this wintery midnight, while Sir Jasper Kingsland walks moodily up and down---up and down---Lady Kingsland, in the chamber above, lies ill unto death.

An hour passes---the clock in the turret and the buhl toy on the stone mantel toll solemnly one. The embers drop monotonously through the grate---a dog bays deeply somewhere in the quadrangle below---the wailing wind of coming morning sighs lamentingly through the tossing copper-beeches, and the roar of the surf afar off comes ever and anon like distant thunder. The house is silent as the tomb---so horribly silent that the cold drops start out on the face of the tortured man. Who knows? Death has been on the threshold of that upper chamber all night, waiting for his prey. This awful hush may be the paean that proclaims that he is master!

A tap at the door. The baronet paused in his stride and turned his bloodshot eyes that way. His very voice was hollow and unnatural as he said:

"Come in."

A servant entered---the same who had gone his errand.

"The Reverend Cyrus Green is here, sir. Shall I show him up?"

"Yes---no---I cannot see him. Show him into the drawing-room until he is needed."

"He will not be needed," said a voice at his elbow, and Doctor Parker Godroy came briskly forward. "My dear Sir Jasper, allow me to congratulate you! All is well, thank Heaven, and---it is a son!"

Sir Jasper Kingsland sunk into a seat, thrilling from head to foot, turning sick and faint in the sudden revulsion from despair to hope.

"Saved?" he said, in a gasping whisper. "*Both?*"

"Both, my dear Sir Jasper!" the doctor responded, cordially. "Your good lady is very much prostrated---exhausted---but that was to be looked for, you know; and the baby---ah! the finest boy I have had the pleasure of presenting to an admiring world within ten years. Come and see them!"

"May I?" the baronet cried, starting to his feet.

"Certainly, my dear Sir Jasper---most certainly. There is nothing in the world to hinder---only be a little cautious, you know. Our good lady must be kept composed and quiet, and left to sleep; and you will just take one peep and go. We

won't need the Reverend Cyrus."

He led the way from the library, rubbing his hands as your brisk little physicians do, up a grand stair-way where you might have driven a coach and four, and into a lofty and most magnificently furnished bed-chamber.

"Quiet, now---quiet," the doctor whispered, warningly. "Excite her, and I won't be answerable for the result."

Sir Jasper Kingsland replied with a rapid gesture, and walked forward to the bed. His own face was perfectly colorless, and his lips were twitching with intense suppressed feeling. He bent above the still form.

"Olivia," he said, "my darling, my darling!"

The heavy eyelids fluttered and lifted, and a pair of haggard, dark eyes gazed up at him. A wan smile parted those pallid lips.

"Dear Jasper! I knew you would come. Have you seen the baby? It is a boy."

"My own, I have thought only of you. My poor pale wife, how awfully death-like you look!"

"But I am not going to die---Doctor Godroy says so," smiling gently. "And now you must go, for I cannot talk. Only kiss me first, and look at the baby."

Her voice was the merest whisper. He pressed his lips passionately to the white face and rose up. Nurse and baby sat in state by the fire, and a slender girl of fifteen years knelt beside them, and gazed in a sort of rapture at the infant prodigy.

"Look, papa---look? The loveliest little thing, and nurse says the very picture of you!"

Not very lovely, certainly; but Sir Jasper Kingsland's eyes lighted with pride and joy as he looked. For was it not a boy? Had he not at last, after weary, weary waiting, the desire of his heart---a son to inherit the estate and perpetuate the ancient name?

"It is so sweet, papa!" Miss Mildred whispered, her small, rather sickly face quite radiant; "and its eyes are the image of yours. He's asleep now, you know, and you can't see them. And look at the dear, darling little hands and fingers and feet, and the speck of a nose and the dot of a mouth! Oh papa! isn't it splendid to have a baby in the house?"

"Very splendid," said papa, relaxing into a smile. "A fine little fellow, nurse! There, cover him up again and let him sleep. We must take extra care of the heir of Kingsland Court. And Mildred, child, you should be in bed. One o'clock is no hour for little girls to be out of their nests."

"Oh, papa! as if I could sleep and not see the baby!"

"Well, you have seen it, and now run away to your room. Mamma and baby both want to sleep, and nurse doesn't need you, I am sure."

"That I don't," said nurse, "nor the doctor, either. So run away, Miss Milly, and go to sleep yourself. The baby will be here, all safe for you, in the morning."

The little girl---a flaxen-haired, pretty-featured child---kissed the baby, kissed papa, and dutifully departed. Sir Jasper followed her out of the room, down the stairs, and back into the library, with the face of a man who has just been relieved from sudden death. As he re-entered the library, he paused and started a step back, gazing fixedly at one of the windows. The heavy curtain had been partially drawn back, and a white, spectral face was glued to the glass, glaring in.

"Who have we here?" said the baronet to himself; "that face can belong to no one in the house."

He walked straight to the window---the face never moved. A hand was raised and tapped on the glass. A voice outside spoke:

"For Heaven's sake, open and let me in, before I perish in this bitter storm."

Sir Jasper Kingsland opened the window and flung it wide.

"Enter! whoever you are," he said. "No one shall ask in vain at Kingsland, this happy night."

He stepped back, and, all covered with snow, the midnight intruder entered and stood before him. And Sir Jasper Kingsland saw the strangest-looking creature he had ever beheld in the whole course of his life.

CHAPTER II.

Achmet the astrologer.

An old man, yet tall and upright, wearing a trailing cloak of dull black, long gray hair flowing over the shoulders, and tight to the scalp a skull-cap of black velvet. A patriarchal board, abundant and silver-white, streamed down his breast, and out of a dull, white face, seamed and wrinkled, looked a pair of eyes piercing and black.

Sir Jasper took a step backward, and regarded this singular apparition in wonder. The old man folded his arms across his bosom---and made him a profound Oriental salaam.

"The Lord of Kingsland gazes in amaze at the uninvited stranger. And yet I think destiny has sent me hither."

"Who are you?" the baronet demanded. "What jugglery is this? Are you dressed for an Eastern dervish in a melodrama, and have you come here to play a practical joke? I am afraid I can not appreciate the humor of the masquerade. Who are you?" sternly.

"Men call me Achmet the Astrologer."

"An astrologer? Humph! your black art, it seems, could not protect you from a January storm," retorted Sir Jasper, with a cynical sneer. "But come in---come in. Astrologer or demon, or whatever you are, you look too old a man to be abroad such a night, when we would not turn an enemy's dog from the house. The doors of Kingsland are never closed to the tired wayfarer, and of all nights in the year they should not be closed to-night."

"When an heir is born to an ancient name and a princely inheritance, you speak rightly, my Lord of Kingsland."

"How say you? What do you know of the events of this night, Sir Astrologer?"

"Much, Sir Jasper Kingsland, and for the very reason you deride---because I am an astrologer. I read the stars, and I lift the veil of the future, and, lo! I behold your life years before you have lived it!"

Sir Jasper Kingsland laughed a cynical, unbelieving laugh.

"You jeer at me, you scoff at my words," murmured the old man, in soft, steady tones, "and yet there was no one to tell me on my way here that a son and heir had been born to the house of Kingsland within the past hour."

He lifted his arm and pointed to the clock, his dark eyes fixed upon the baronet's changing face.

"You deride the power I profess, yet every day you quote your English poet, and believe him when he says: 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy.' But I am accustomed to derision, and it does not offend me. Let me prove my power, so that even the most resolute skeptic dare doubt no longer. Judge of my skill to read the future by my ability in reading the past. I have come here---I have taken a long journey to look into the future of your new-born son. Before I begin, let me look into the past of his father. Sir Jasper Kingsland, let me read your palm."

But Sir Jasper drew back.

"You have taken a long journey to look into the future of my son? Pray, what is my son to you?"

"That is my secret, Sir Jasper, and my secrets I keep. Come, hold forth your hand, and test my skill."

"Why should I? Even if you can bring before me my past life, of what use will it be, since I must know all better than you?"

"My power to read the past may prove my power to read the future."

"Nay, you may easily know the past, without magical skill. Many thanks, my venerable friend, but I will not put your necromancy to the test."

"Is Sir Jasper Kingsland afraid?" he said. "Surely not, for he comes of a daring race. And yet it seems like it."

"By Heaven! if a younger man had spoken those words I would have hurled him by the throat from yonder window. Be careful of your words, old man, else even your hoary hairs may fail to save you."

Once more the astrologer bent servilely.

"I cry your mercy, my haughty Lord of Kingsland. It shall be as you say. I will depart as I came. I will not serve you nor your new-born son, since you refuse to be served. I will depart at once. I fear no earthly storm. Good-night, Sir Jasper Kingsland. Look to the heir of your house yourself. When 'angels unaware' visit you again, treat them better than you have treated me."

With a gesture indescribably grand and kingly, the silver-haired old man turned to go, folding his long cloak about him. But the voice of the baronet called him back.

"Stay," he said. "You speak of serving my son. What danger threatens his infant life that you can avert?"

"I know of none. I have not cast the horoscope yet."

"Then you wish to do so?"

"With your good permission. I have taken a long journey for that very purpose, Sir Jasper."

"Then you shall," the baronet cried, yielding to a swift impulse---"you shall cast his horoscope. If it can avert no evil, it can, at least, cause none. But, first, there is no action without its ruling motive. What are me or mine to you, to make you take a long and toilsome journey on our account?"

The old man paused, drawn up to his fullest height, imposing as a new King Lear, his deep, dark eyes glowing with inward fire.

"I will tell you," he said. "Years ago, Sir Jasper, when you were a young man, you did an honor and a service to one I dearly love; that I have never forgotten and never will forget! You have ceased to remember it years ago, no doubt; but I never have, nor ever will until my dying day."

"A service! an honor! What could it have been? I recollect nothing of it."

"I expected as much; but my memory is a good one. It is stamped on my heart forever. Great men like Sir Jasper Kingsland, grandees of the land, forget these little things. I owe you a long debt, Sir Jasper, and I will pay it to the uttermost farthing, so help me God!"

His black eyes blazed, his low voice rose, his arm uplifted fiercely for an instant in dire menace. Then, quick as lightning flashes, all was transformed. The eyes were bent upon the carpet, the arms folded, the voice sunk, soft and servile.

"Forgive me!" he murmured. "In my gratitude I forget myself. But you have my motive in coming here---the desire to repay you; to look into the future of your son; to see the evils that may threaten his youth and manhood, and to place you on your guard against them. 'Forewarned is fore-armed,' you know. Do not doubt my power. In far-off Oriental lands, under the golden stars of Syria, I learned the lore of the wise men of the East. I learned to read the stars as you Englishmen read your printed books. Believe and trust, and let me cast the horoscope of your son."

"First let me test your vaunted power. Show me my past, before you show me my son's future."

He held forth his hand with a cynical smile,

"As you will. Past and future are alike to me---save that the past is easier to read. Ah! a palm seamed and crossed and marked with troubled lines. Forty years have not gone and left no trace behind---"

"Forty years!" interrupted Sir Jasper, with sneering emphasis. "Pray do not bungle in the very beginning."

"I bungle not," answered Achmet, sternly. "Forty years ago, on the third of next month, you, Jasper Southdown Kingsland, were born beneath this very roof."

"Right!" he said. "You know my age. But go on."

"Your boyhood you passed here---quiet, eventless years---with a commonplace mother and a dull, proud father. At ten, your mother went to her grave. At twelve, the late Sir Noel followed her. At thirteen, you, a lonely orphan, were removed from this house to London in the charge of a guardian that you hated. Am I not right?"

"You are. Pray go on."

"At fourteen, you went to Rugby to school. From that time until you attained your majority your life passed in public schools and universities, harmlessly and monotonously enough. At twenty-one, you left Cambridge, and started to make the grand tour. You were tolerably clever; you were young and handsome, and heir to a noble inheritance. Your life was to be the life of a great and good man---a benefactor to the human race. Your memory was to be a magnificent memento for a whole world to honor. Your dreams were wild, vague, and impracticable, and ended in---nothing."

Sir Jasper Kingsland listened and stared like a man in a dream. Achmet the Astrologer continued to read the palm with a fixed, stony face.

"And now the lines are crossed, and the trouble begins. As usual, a woman is at the bottom of it. Sir Jasper Kingsland is in love."

There was a pause. The baronet winced a little.

"It is in Spain---glowing, gorgeous Spain---and she is one of its loveliest children. The oranges and pomegranates scent the burning air, the vineyards glow in the tropic sun, and golden summer forever reigns. But the glowing southern sun is not more brilliant than the Spanish gypsy's flashing black eyes, nor the pomegranate blossoms half so ripe and red as her cheeks. She is Zenith, the Zingara, and you love her!"

"In the fiend's name!" Sir Jasper Kingsland cried, "what jugglery is this?"

"One moment more, my Lord of Kingsland," he said, "and I have done. Let me see how your love-dream ends. Ah! the old, old story. Surely I might have known. She is beautiful as the angels above, and as innocent, and she loves you with a mad abandon that is worse than idolatry---as only women ever love. And you? You are grand and noble, a milor Inglese, and you take her love---her crazy worship---as a demi-god might, with uplifted grace, as your birthright; and she is your pretty toy of an hour. And then careless and happy, you are gone. Sunny Spain, with its olives and its vineyards, its pomegranates and its Zenith the Gitana, is left far behind, and you are roaming, happy and free, through La Belle France. And lo! Zenith the forsaken lies prone upon the ground, and goes stark mad for the day-god she has lost. There, Sir Jasper Kingsland! the record is a black one. I wish to read no more."

He flung the baronet's hand away, and once more his eyes glowed like the orbs of a demon. But Sir Jasper Kingsland, pale as a dead man, saw it not.

"Are you man or devil?" he said, in an awe-struck tone. "No living mortal knows what you have told me this night."

Achmet the Astrologer smiled---a dire, dark smile.

"Man, in league with the dark potentate you have named, if you like. Whatever I am, I have truthfully told you the past, as I will truthfully tell your son's future."

"By palmistry?"

"No, by the stars. And behold!" drawing aside the curtain, "yonder they shine!"

"Take me to an upper room," the astrologer exclaimed, in an inspired tone, "and leave me. Destiny is propitious. The fate that ruled your son's birth has set forth the shining stars for Achmet to read. Lead on!"

Like a man in a dreamy swoon, Sir Jasper Kingsland obeyed. He led the astrologer up the grand sweeping staircases--up and up, to the very top of the house--to the lofty, lonely battlements. Cloudless spread the wide night sky; countless and brilliant shone the stars; peaceful and majestic slept, the purple sea; spotless white gleamed the snowy earth. A weird, witching scene.

"Leave me," said the astrologer, "and watch and wait. When the first little pink cloud of sunrise blushes in the sky, come to me. My task will have ended."

He waved him away with a regal motion. He stood there gazing at the stars, as a king looking upon his subjects. And the haughty baronet, without a word, turned and left him.

The endless hours wore on--two, three, and four--and still the baronet watched and waited, and looked for the coming of dawn. Faintly the silver light broke in the Orient, rosy flushed the first red ray. Sir Jasper mounted to the battlements, still like a man in a dazed dream.

Achmet the Astrologer turned slowly round. The pale, frosty sunrise had blanched his ever-white face with a livid hue of death. In one hand he held a folded paper, in the other a pencil. He had been writing.

"Have you done?" the baronet asked.

"I am done. Your son's fate is here."

He touched the paper.

"Is that for me?" he asked, shrinking palpably from it even while he spoke.

"This is for you." The astrologer handed him the paper as he spoke. "It is for you to read--to do with after as you see fit. I have but one word to say: not I, but a mightier power traced the words you will read--your son's irrevocable fate. Don't hope to shirk it. My task is ended, and I go. Farewell!"

"No, no," the baronet cried; "not so! Remain and breakfast here. The morning is but just breaking."

"And before yonder sun is above the horizon I will be far away. No, Sir Jasper Kingsland, I break no bread under your roof. I have done my work, and depart forever. Look to your son!"

He spoke the last words slowly, with a tigerish glare of hate leaping out of his eyes, with deadly menace in every syllable. Then he was gone down the winding stair-way like a black ghost, and so out and away.

Sir Jasper Kingsland took the folded paper and sought his room. There in the pale day-dawn he tore it open. One side was covered with cabalistic characters, Eastern symbols, curious marks and hieroglyphics. The other side was written in French, in long, clear, legible characters. There was a heading: "Horoscope of the Heir of Kingsland." Sir Jasper sat down and began to read.

Nearly an hour after, a servant, entering to replenish the faded fire, fled out of the room and startled the household with his shrieks. Two or three domestics rushed in. There lay Sir Jasper Kingsland prone on his face on the floor, stiff and stark as a dead man. A paper, unintelligible to all, was clutched tightly as a death grip in his hand. Reading that crumpled paper, the strong man had fallen there flat on the floor in a dead swoon.

CHAPTER III.

The hut on the heath.

Far away from the lofty, battlemented ancestral home of Sir Jasper Kingsland---straight to the seashore went Achmet the Astrologer. A long strip of bleak marshland spreading down the hill-side and sloping to the sea, arid and dry in the summer-time---sloppy and sodden now---that was his destination. It was called Hunsden's Heath---a forlorn and desolate spot, dotted over with cottages of the most wretched kind. To one of these wretched hovels, standing nearest the sea and far removed from the rest, Achmet swiftly made his way.

The sun was high in the heavens; the sea lay all a-glitter beneath it. The astrologer had got over the ground at a swift, swinging stride, and he had walked five miles at least; but he paused now, with little sign of fatigue in his strange white face. Folding his arms over his breast, he surveyed the shining sky, the glittering sea, with a slow, dreamy smile.

"The sun shines and the sea sparkles on the natal day of the heir of Kingsland," he said to himself; "but for all that it is a fatal day to him. 'The sins of the father shall be visited on the children even to the third and fourth generation,' saith the Book Christians believe in. Christians!" he laughed a harsh, strident laugh. "Sir Jasper Kingsland is a Christian! The religion that produces such men must be a glorious one. He was a Christian when he perjured himself and broke her heart. 'Tis well. As a Christian he can not object to the vengeance Christianity teaches."

He turned away, approached the lonely hut, and tapped thrice---sharp staccato knocks---at the door. The third one was answered. The door swung back, and a dark damsel looked out.

"Is it thee, Pietro?"

"It is I, Zara."

He stepped in as he spoke, closed the door, took her face between his hands, and kissed both brown cheeks. The girl's dark face lighted up into the splendor of absolute beauty as she returned his caress.

"And how is it with thee, my Zara, and thy little one?"

"It is well. And thyself, Pietro?"

"Very well. And the mother?"

"Ah, the mother! Poor mother! She lies as you saw her last---as you will always see her in this lower world---dead in life! And he"---the girl Zara's eyes lighted fiercely up---"didst see him, Pietro?"

"I have seen him, spoken to him, told him the past, and terrified him for the future. There is a son, Zara---a new-born son."

"Dog and son of a dog!" Zara cried, furiously. "May curses light upon him in the hour of his birth, and upon all who bear his hated name! Say, Pietro, why didst thou not strangle the little viper as you would any other poisonous reptile?"

"My Zara, I did not even see him. He lies cradled in rose leaves, no doubt, and the singing of the west wind is not sweet enough for his lullaby. No profane eye must rest on this sacred treasure fresh from the hands of the gods! Is he not the heir of Kingsland? But Achmet the Astrologer has cast his horoscope, and Achmet, and Zara, his wife, wilt see that the starry destiny is fulfilled. Shall we not?"

"If I only had him here," Zara cried, clawing the air with her two hands, "I would throttle the baby snake, and fling him dead in his father's face. And that father! Oh, burning alive would be far too merciful for him!"

Achmet smiled, and drew her long black braids caressingly through his fingers.

"You know how to hate, and you will teach our little one. Yes, the fate I have foretold shall come to pass, and the son of Sir Jasper will live to curse the day of his birth. And now I will remove my disguise, and wash and breakfast, for I feel the calls of hunger."

The lower apartment of the hut on the heath was the very picture of abject poverty and dreary desolation. The earthen floor was broken and rough; the sunlight came sifting through the chinks in the broken walls. A smoky fire of wet driftwood smoldered, under a pot on the crook. There was neither table nor chairs. A straw pallet with a wretched coverlet lay in one corner; a few broken stools were scattered around; a few articles of clothing hung on the wall. That was all.

"The little one sleeps," the man said, casting a swift glance over at the pallet. "Our pretty baby, Zara. Ah, if Sir Jasper Kingsland loves his first-born son as we love our child, or half so well, we are almost avenged already!"

"He had need to love it better than his first-born daughter!" Zara said, fiercely. "The lion loves its whelp, the tiger its cub; but he, less human than the brutes, casts off his offspring in the hour of its birth!"

"Meaning yourself, my Zara?" the man said, with his slow, soft smile. "What would you have, degraded daughter of a degraded mother---his toy of an hour? And there is another daughter---a fair-haired, insipid nonentity of a dozen years, no more like our beautiful one here than a farthing rush-light is like the stars of heaven."

He drew down the tattered quilt, and gazed with shining eyes of love and admiration at the sleeping face of a child, a baby girl of scarce two years, the cherub face rosy with sleep, smiling in her dreams; the long, silky black lashes sweeping the flushed cheek; the abundant, feathery, jet-black curls floating loosely about---an exquisite picture of blooming, healthful, beautiful childhood.

Zara came to where the man knelt.

"My beautiful one! my rosebud!" she murmured. "Pietro, the sun shines on nothing half so lovely in this lower world!"

"And yet the black, bad blood of the Gitana flows in her veins, too. She is a Spanish gypsy, as her mother and grandmother before her. Nay, not her mother, since the blue blood of all the Kingsland's flows in her veins."

"Never!" cried Zara, her eyes ablaze. "If I thought one drop of that man's bitter blood throbbled in my heart, the first knife I met should let it forth. Look at me!" she wildly cried, "look at me, Pietro---Zara, your wife! Have I one look of him or his abhorred English race?"

"My Zara, no! You are Sir Jasper Kingsland's daughter, but there is no look of the great Sir Jasper in your gypsy face, nor in the face of our darling, either. She is all our own!"

"I would strangle her in her cradle, dearly as I love her, else!" the woman said, her passionate face aflame. "Pietro, my blood is like liquid fire when I think of him and my mother's wrongs."

"Wait, Zara---wait. The wheel will turn and our time come. And now for breakfast!"

She whipped off the pot, removed the lid, and a savory gush of steam filled the room. The man Pietro laughed.

"Our poached hare smells appetizing. Keep the choicest morsel for the mother, Zara, and tell her I will be with her presently. There! Achmet the Astrologer lies in a heap."

He had deftly taken off his flowing cloak, his long, silvery beard and hair, and flung them together in a corner, and now he stood in the center of the room, a stalwart young fellow of thirty or thereabouts, with great Spanish eyes and profuse curling hair of an inky blackness.

"Let me but wash this white enamel off my face," he said, giving himself a shake, "and Pietro is himself again. Sir Jasper would hardly recognize Achmet, I fancy, if he saw him now."

He walked to a shelf on which was placed a wash-bowl and towel, and plunged his face and head into the cold water. Five minutes' vigorous splashing and rubbing, and he emerged, his pallid face brown as a berry, his black hair in a snarl of crisp curls.

"And now to satisfy the inner man," he said, walking over to the pot, seizing a wooden spoon, and drawing up a cricket. "My tramp of last night and this morning has made me famously hungry, Zara."

"And the hare soup is good," said Zara. "While you breakfast, Pietro, I will go to mother. Come up when you finish."

A steep stair-way that was like a ladder led to the loft. Zara ascended this with agile fleetness, and the late astrologer was left alone at his very unmagician-like work of scraping the pot with a wooden spoon. Once or twice, as the fancy crossed him of the contrast between Achmet, the Astrologer reading the stars, and Pietro the tramp scraping the bones of the stolen hare, he laughed grimly to himself.

"And the world is made up of just such contrasts," he thought, "and Pietro at his homely breakfast is more to be dreaded than Achmet casting the horoscope. Ah! Sir Jasper Kingsland, it is a very fine thing to be a baronet with fifteen thousand pounds a year, a noble ancestral seat, a wife you love, and a son you adore. And yet Pietro, the vagabond tramp---the sunburned gypsy, with stolen hares to eat, and rags to wear, and a hut to lodge in---would not exchange places with you this bright March day. We have sworn vendetta to you and all of your blood, and we will keep our vow!"

His swarthy face darkened with passionate vindictiveness as he arose.

"As a man sows so shall he reap," he muttered between his clinched teeth, setting his face toward Kingsland Court. "You, my Lord of Kingsland, have sown the wind. You shall learn what it is to reap the whirlwind!"

"Pietro! Pietro!" crowed a little voice, gleefully. "Papa Pietro! take Sunbeam!"

The little sleeper in the bed had sat up, her bright, dark face sparkling, two little dimpled arms outstretched.

The man turned, his vindictive face growing radiant.

"Papa Pietro's darling! his life! his angel! And how does the little Sunbeam?"

He caught her up, covering her face with kisses.

"My love! my life! my darling! When Pietro is dead, and Zara is old and feeble, and Zenith dust and ashes, you will live, my radiant angel, my black-eyed beauty, to perpetuate the malediction. When his son is a man, you will be a woman, with all a woman's subtle power and more than a woman's beauty, and you will be his curse, and his bane, and his blight, as his father has been ours! Will you not, my little Sunbeam?"

"Yes, papa---yes, papa!" lisped the little one.

"Pietro!" called his wife, "if you have done breakfast, come up. Mother is awake and would see you."

"Coming, *carissima!*"

He kissed the baby girl, placed her on the pallet, and sprung lightly up the steep stair.

The loft was just a shade less wretched than the apartment below. There was a bed on the floor, more decently covered, two broken chairs, a table with some medicine bottles and cups, and a white curtain on the one poor window.

On the bed lay a woman, over whom Pietro bent reverently the moment he entered the room. It was the wreck of a woman who, in the days gone by, must have been gloriously beautiful; who was beautiful still, despite the ravages years, sickness, and poverty had wrought.

The eyes that blazed brilliant and black were the eyes of Zara---the eyes of the baby Sunbeam below---and this woman was the mother of one, the grandmother of the other.

Pietro knelt by the pallet and tenderly kissed one transparent hand. The great black eyes turned upon him wild and wide.

"Thou hast seen him, Pietro?" in a breathless sort of way. "Zara says so."

"I have seen him, my mother; I have spoken to him. I spent hours with Sir Jasper Kingsland last night."

"Thou didst?" Her words came pantingly, while passion throbbed in every line of her face. "And there is a son---an heir?"

"There is."

She snatched her hand away and threw up her withered arms with a vindictive shriek.

"And I lie here, a helpless log, and he triumphs! I, Zenith, the Queen of the Tribe---I, once beautiful and powerful, happy and free! I lie here, a withered hulk, what he has made me! And a son and heir is born to him!"

As if the thought had goaded her to madness, she leaped up in bed, tossing her gaunt arms and shrieking madly:

"Take me to him---take me to him! Zara! Pietro! Take me to him, if ye are children of mine, that I may hurl my burning curse upon him and his son before I die!"

She fell back with an impotent scream, and the man Pietro caught her in his arms. Quivering and convulsed, she writhed in an epileptic fit.

"She will kill herself yet," Pietro said. "Hand me the drops, Zara."

Zara poured something out of a bottle into a cup, and Pietro held it to the sick woman's livid lips.

She choked and swallowed, and, as if by magic, lay still in his arms. Very tenderly he laid her back on the bed.

"She will sleep now, Zara," he said. "Let us go."

They descended the stairs. Down below, the man laid his hands on his wife's shoulders and looked into her face.

"Watch her, Zara," he said, "for she is mad, and the very first opportunity she will make her escape and seek out Sir Jasper Kingsland; and that is the very last thing I want. So watch your mother well."

CHAPTER IV.

An uninvited guest.

Sir Jasper Kingsland stood moodily alone. He was in the library, standing by the window---that very window through which, one stormy night scarcely a month before, he had admitted Achmet the Astrologer. He stood there with a face of such dark gloom that all the brightness of the sunlit April day could not cast one enlivening gleam.

He stood there scowling darkly upon it all, so lost in his own somber thoughts that he did not hear the library door open, nor the soft rustle of a woman's dress as she halted on the threshold.

A fair and stately lady, with a proud, colorless face lighted up with pale-blue eyes, and with bands of pale flaxen hair pushed away under a dainty lace cap---a lady who looked scarce thirty, although almost ten years older, unmistakably handsome, unmistakably proud. It was Olivia, Lady Kingsland.

"Alone, Sir Jasper!" a musical voice said. "May I come in, or do you prefer solitude and your own thoughts?"

The sweet voice---soft and low, as a lady's voice should be---broke the somber spell that bound him. He wheeled round, his dark, moody face lighting up at sight of her, as all the glorious morning sunshine never could have lighted it. That one radiant look would have told you how he loved his wife.

"You, Olivia?" he cried, advancing. "Surely this is a surprise! My dearest, is it quite prudent in you to leave your room?"

He took the slender, white-robed figure in his arms, and kissed her as tenderly as a bridegroom of a week might have done. Lady Kingsland laughed a soft, tinkling little laugh.

"A month is quite long enough to be a prisoner, Jasper, even although a prisoner of state. And on my boy's christening fete---the son and heir I have desired so long---ah, surely a weaker mother than I might essay to quit her room."

The moody darkness, like a palpable frown, swept over the baronet's face again at her words.

"Is he dressed?" he asked.

"He is dressed and asleep, and Lady Helen and Mr. Carlyon, his godmother and godfather, are hovering over the crib like twin guardian angels. And Mildred sits *en grande tenue* on her cricket, in a speechless trance of delight, and nurse rustles about in her new silk gown and white lace cap with an air of importance and self-complacency almost indescribable. The domestic picture only wants papa and mamma to make it complete."

She laughed as she spoke, a little sarcastically; but Sir Jasper's attempt even to smile was a ghastly failure.

Lady Kingsland folded both her hands on his shoulder, and looked up in his face with anxious, searching eyes.

"What is it?" she asked.

The baronet laughed uneasily.

"What is what?"

"This gloom, this depression, this dark, mysterious moodiness. Jasper, what has changed you of late?"

"Mysterious moodiness! changed me of late! Nonsense, Olivia! I don't know what you mean."

Again he strove to laugh, and again it was a wretched failure.

Lady Kingsland's light-blue eyes never left his face.

"I think you do, Jasper. Since the night of our boy's birth you have been another man. What is it?"

A spasm crossed the baronet's face; his lips twitched convulsively; his face slowly changed to a gray, ashen pallor.

"What is it?" the lady slowly reiterated. "Surely my husband, after all these years, has no secrets from me?"

The tender reproach of her tone, of her eyes, stung the husband, who loved her, to the quick.

"For God's sake, Olivia, don't ask me!" he cried passionately. "It would be sheerest nonsense in your eyes, I know. You would but laugh at what half drives me mad!"

Jasper!"

"Don't look at me with that reproachful face, Olivia! It is true. You would look upon it as sheerest folly, I tell you, and laugh at me for a credulous fool."

"No," said Lady Kingsland, quietly, and a little coldly. "You know me better. I could never laugh at what gives my husband pain."

"Pain! I have lived in torment ever since, and yet---who knows?---it may be absurdest jugglery. But he told me the past so truly---my very thoughts! And no one could know what happened in Spain so many years ago! Oh, I must believe

it--I can not help it---and that belief will drive me mad!"

Lady Kingsland stood looking and listening, in pale wonder.

"I don't understand a word of this," she said, slowly. "Will you tell me, Sir Jasper, or am I to understand you have secrets your wife may not share?"

"My own dear wife," he said---"my best beloved---Heaven knows, if I have one secret from you, I keep it that I may save you sorrow. Not one cloud should ever darken the sunshine of your sky, if I had my way. You are right---I have a secret---a secret of horror, and dread, and dismay---a terrible secret that sears my brain and burns my heart! Olivia, my darling, its very horror prevents my telling it to you!"

"Does it concern our boy?" she asked, quickly.

"Yes!" with a groan. "Now you can understand its full terror. It menaces the son I love more than life. I thought to keep it from you; I tried to appear unchanged; but it seems I have failed miserably."

"And you will not tell me what this secret is?"

"I dare not! I would not have you suffer as I suffer."

"A moment ago you said I would laugh at it and you. Your terms are inconsistent, Sir Jasper."

"Spare me, Olivia!--I scarce know what I say---and do not be angry."

She drew her hands coldly and haughtily away from his grasp. She was a thoroughly proud woman, and his secrecy stung her.

"I am not angry, Sir Jasper. Keep your secret, if you will. I was foolish enough to fancy I had right to know of any danger that menaces my baby, but it appears I was mistaken. In half an hour the carriages will start for the church. You will find us all in the nursery."

She was sweeping proudly away in silent anger, but the baronet strode after her and caught her arm.

"You will know this!" he said, huskily. "Olivia, Olivia! you are cruel to yourself and to me, but you shall hear---part, at least. I warn you, however, you will be no happier for knowing."

"Go on," she said, steadily.

He turned from her, walked to the window, and kept his back to her while he spoke.

"You have no faith in fortune-tellers, clairvoyants, astrologers, and the like, have you, Olivia?"

"Most certainly not!"

"Then what I have to say will scarcely trouble you as it troubles me---for I believe; and the prediction of an astrologer has ruined my peace for the past month."

"Is that all? The mountain in labor has brought forth a mouse. My dear Sir Jasper, how can you be so simply credulous?"

"I knew you would laugh," said Sir Jasper, moodily; "I said so. But laugh if you can. I believe!"

"Was the prediction very terrible, then?" asked his wife, with a smile. "Pray tell me all about it."

"It was terrible," her husband replied, sternly. "The living horror it has cast over me might have told you that. Listen, Olivia! On that night of our baby boy's birth, after I left you and came here, I stood by this window and saw a spectral face gleaming through the glass. It was the face of a man---a belated wayfarer---who adjured me, in the Savior's name, to let him in."

"Well, you let him in, I suppose?"

"I let him in---a strange-looking object, Olivia, like no creature I ever saw before, with flowing beard and hair silver-white---"

"False, no doubt."

"He wore a long, disguising cloak and a skull-cap," went on Sir Jasper, "and his face was blanched to a dull dead white. He would have looked like a resuscitated corpse, only for a pair of burning black eyes."

"Quite a startling apparition! Melodramatic in the extreme! And this singular being---what was he? Clairvoyant, astrologer, what?"

"Astrologer---an Eastern astrologer---Achmet by name."

"And who, probably, never was further than London in his life-time. A well-got-up charlatan, no doubt."

"Charlatan he may have been; Englishman he was not. His face, his speech, convinced me of that. And, Olivia, charlatan or no, he told me my past life as truly as I knew it myself."

Lady Kingsland listened with a quiet smile.

"No doubt he has been talking to the good people of the village and to the servants in the house."

"Neither the people of the village nor the servants of the house know aught of what he told me. He showed me what transpired twenty years ago.

"Twenty years ago?"

"Yes, when I was fresh from Cambridge, and making my first tour. Events that occurred in Spain---that no one under heaven save myself can know of---he told me."

"That was strange!"

"Olivia, it was astounding---incomprehensible! I should never have credited one word he said but for that. He told me the past as I know it myself. Events that transpired in a far foreign land a score of years ago, known, as I thought, to no

creature under heaven, he told me of as if they had transpired yesterday. The very thoughts that I thought in that by-gone time he revealed as if my heart lay open before him. How, then, could I doubt? If he could lift the veil of the irrevocable past, why not be able to lift the veil of the mysterious future? He took the hour of our child's birth and ascended to the battlements, and there, alone with the stars of heaven, he cast his horoscope. Olivia, men in all ages have believed in this power of astrology, and I believe as firmly as I believe in Heaven."

Lady Kingsland listened, and that quiet smile of half amusement, half contempt never left her lips.

"And the horoscope proved a horrorscope, no doubt," she said, the smile deepening. "You paid your astrologer handsomely, I presume, Sir Jasper?"

"I gave him nothing. He would take nothing---not even a cup of water. Of his own free will he cast the horoscope, and, without reward of any kind, went his way when he had done."

"What did you say the name was?"

"Achmet the Astrologer."

"Melodramatic again! And now, Sir Jasper, what awful fate betides our boy?"

"Ask me not! You do not believe. What the astrologer foretold I shall tell no one."

"The carriage waits, my lady," a servant said, entering. "Lady Helen bade me remind you, my lady, it is time to start for church."

Lady Kingsland hastily glanced at her watch.

"Why, so it is! I had nearly forgotten. Come, Sir Jasper, and forget your fears on this happy day."

She led him from the room. Baby, in its christening-ropes, slept in nurse's arms, and Lady Helen and Mr. Carlyon stood impatiently waiting.

"We will certainly be late!" Lady Helen, who was god-mamma, said, fussily. "Had we not better depart at once, Sir Jasper?"

"I am quite at your ladyship's service. We will not delay an instant longer. Proceed, nurse."

Nurse, with her precious burden, went before. Sir Jasper drew Lady Helen's arm within his own, and Mr. Carlyon followed with little Mildred Kingsland.

Lady Kingsland watched the carriage out of sight, and then went slowly and thoughtfully back to her room.

"How extremely foolish and weak of Sir Jasper," she was thinking, "to pay the slightest attention to the canting nonsense of these fortune-telling impostors! If I had been in his place I would have had him horsewhipped from my gates for his pains. I must find out what this terrible prediction was and laugh it out of my husband's mind."

Meantime the carriage rolled down the long avenue, under the majestic copper-beeches, through the lofty gates, and along the bright sunlit road leading to the village.

In stole and surplice, within the village church, the Reverend Cyrus Green, Rector of Stonehaven, stood by the baptismal font, waiting to baptize the heir of all the Kingslands.

Stately, Sir Jasper Kingsland strode up the aisle, with Lady Helen upon his arm. No trace of the trouble within showed in his pale face as he heard his son baptized Everard Jasper Carew Kingsland.

The ceremony was over. Nurse took the infant baronet again; Lady Helen adjusted her mantle, and the Reverend Cyrus Green was blandly offering his congratulations to the greatest man in the parish, when a sudden commotion at the door startled all. Some one striving to enter, and some other one refusing admission.

"Let me in, I tell you!" cried a shrill, piercing voice---the voice of an angry woman. "Stand aside, woman! I will see Sir Jasper Kingsland."

With the last ringing words the intruder burst past the pew-opener, and rushed wildly into the church. A weird and unearthly figure---like one of Macbeth's witches---with streaming black hair floating over a long, red cloak, and two black eyes of flame. All recoiled as the spectral figure rushed up like a mad thing and confronted Sir Jasper Kingsland.

"At last!" she shrilly cried, in a voice that pierced even to the gaping listeners without---"at last, Sir Jasper Kingsland! At last we meet again!"

There was a horrible cry as the baronet started back, putting up both hands, with a look of unutterable horror.

"Good God! Zenith!"

"Yes, Zenith!" shrieked the woman; "Zenith, the beautiful, once! Zenith, the hag, the crone, the madwoman, now! Look at me well, Sir Jasper Kingsland---for the ruin is your own handiwork!"

He stood like a man paralyzed---speechless, stunned---his face the livid hue of death.

The wretched woman stood before him with streaming hair, blazing eyes, and uplifted arm, a very incarnate fury.

"Look at me well!" she fiercely shrieked, tossing her locks of old off her fiery face. "Am I like the Zenith of twenty years ago---young and beautiful, and bright enough even for the fastidious Englishman to love? Look at me now---ugly and old, wrinkled and wretched, deserted and despised---and tell me if I have not greater reason to hate you than ever woman had to hate man?"

She tossed her arms aloft with a madwoman's shriek---crying out her words in a long, wild scream.

"I hate you---I hate you! Villain! dastard! perjured wretch! I hate you, and I curse you, here in the church you call holy! I curse you with a ruined woman's curse, and hot and scathing may it burn on your head and on the heads of your children's children!"

The last horrible words aroused the listeners from their petrified trance. The Reverend Cyrus Green lifted up his voice in a tone of command:

"This woman is mad! She is a furious lunatic! Dawson! Humphreys! come here and secure her!"

"The child! the child!" she cried, with a screech of demoniac delight; "the spawn of the viper is within my grasp!"

One plunge forward and the infant heir was in her arms, held high aloft. One second later, and its blood and brains would have bespattered the stone floor, but Mr. Carlyon sprang forward and wrenched it from her grasp.

The two men summoned by the clergyman closed upon her and held her fast; her frantic shrieks rang to the roof. Then suddenly, all ceased, and, foaming and livid, she fell between them in a fit.

CHAPTER V.

Zenith's malediction.

A dead pause of blank consternation; the faces around a sight to see; horror and wonder in every countenance---most of all in the countenance of Sir Jasper Kingsland.

The clergyman was the first to speak.

"The woman is stark mad," he said. "We must see about this. Such violent lunatics must not be allowed to go at large. Here, Humphreys, do you and Dawson lift her up and carry her to my house. It is the nearest, and she can be properly attended to there."

"You know her, Sir Jasper, do you not?" asked Lady Helen, with quick womanly intuition.

"Know her?" Sir Jasper replied, "know Zenith? Great Heaven! I thought she was dead."

The Reverend Cyrus Green and Lady Helen exchanged glances. Mr. Carlyon looked in sharp surprise at the speaker.

"Then she is not mad, after all! I thought she mistook you for some one else. If you know her, you have the best right to deal with her. Shall these men take her to Kingsland Court?"

"Not for ten thousand worlds!" Sir Jasper cried, impetuously. "The woman is nothing---less than nothing---to me. I knew her once, years ago. I thought her dead and buried; hence the shock her sudden entrance gave me. A lunatic asylum is the proper place for such as she. Let Mr. Green send her there, and the sooner the better."

The Reverend Cyrus Green looked with grave, suspicious eyes for a moment at the leaden face of the speaker.

"There is wrong and mystery about this," he thought---"a dark mystery of guilt. This woman is mad, but her wrongs have driven her mad, and you, Sir Jasper Kingsland, are her wronger."

"It shall be as you say, Sir Jasper," he said, aloud; "that is, if I find this poor creature has no friends. Are you aware whether she has any?"

"I tell you I know nothing of her!" the baronet cried, with fierce impatience. "What should I know of such a wretch as that?"

"More than you dare tell, Sir Jasper Kingsland!" cried a high, ringing voice, as a young woman rushed impetuously into the church and up the aisle. "Coward and liar! False, perjured wretch! You are too white-livered a hound even to tell the truth! What should you know of such a wretch as that, forsooth! Double-dyed traitor and dastard! Look me in the face and tell me you don't know her!"

Every one shrunk in terror and dismay; Sir Jasper stood as a man might stand suddenly struck by lightning. And if looks were lightning, the blazing eyes of the young woman might have blasted him where he stood. A tall and handsome young woman, with black eyes of fire, streaming, raven hair, and a brown gypsy face.

"Who are you, in mercy's name?" cried the Reverend Cyrus Green.

"I am the daughter of this wretch, as your baronet yonder is pleased to call my mad mother. Yes, Mr. Green, she is my mother. If you want to know who my father is, you had better ask Sir Jasper Kingsland!"

"It is false!" the baronet cried, "I know nothing of you or your father. I never set eyes on you before."

"Wait, wait, wait!" the Reverend Cyrus Green cried, imploringly. "For Heaven's sake, young woman, don't make a scene before all these listeners. We will have your mother conveyed into the vestry until she recovers; and if she ever recovers, no time is to be lost in attending to her. Sir Jasper, I think the child had better be sent home immediately. My lady will wonder at the delay."

A faint wail from the infant lying in the nurse's arms seconded the suggestion. That feeble cry and the mention of his wife acted as a magic spell upon the baronet.

"Your mad intruders have startled us into forgetting everything else. Proceed, nurse. Lady Helen, take my arm. Mr. Carlyon, see to Mildred. The child looks frightened to death, and little wonder!"

"Little, indeed!" sighed Lady Helen. "I shall not recover from the shock for a month. It was like a scene in a melodrama---like a chapter of a sensation novel. And you know that dreadful creature, Sir Jasper?"

"I used to know her," the baronet said, with emphasis, "so many years ago that I had almost forgotten she ever existed. She was always more or less mad, I fancy, and it seems hereditary. Her daughter---if daughter she be---seems as distraught as her mother."

"And her name, Sir Jasper? You called her by some name, I think."

"Zenith, I suppose. To tell the truth, Lady Helen, the woman is neither more nor less than a gypsy fortune-teller crazed by a villainous life and villainous liquor. But, for the sake of the days gone by, when she was young and pretty and told my fortune, I think I will go back and see what Mr. Green intends doing with her. Such crazy vagrants should not be allowed to go at large."

The light tone was a ghastly failure, and the smile but a death's-head grin. He placed Lady Helen in the carriage---Mr. Carlyon assisted the nurse and little Mildred. Then Sir Jasper gave the order, "Home," and the stately carriage of the Kingslands, with its emblazoned crest, whirled away in a cloud of dust. For an instant he stood looking after it.

"Curses on it!" he muttered between set teeth. "After all these years, are those dead doings to be flung in my face? I thought her dead and gone; and lo! in the hour of my triumph she rises as if from the grave to confound me. Her daughter, too! I never knew she had a child! Good heavens! how these wild oats we sow in youth flourish and multiply with their bitter, bad fruit!"

He turned and strode into the vestry. On the floor the miserable woman lay, her eyes closed, her jaw fallen. By her side, supporting her head, the younger woman knelt, holding a glass of water to her lips. The Reverend Cyrus Green stood gravely looking on.

"Is she dead?" Sir Jasper asked, in a hard voice.

It was to the clergyman he spoke, but the girl looked fiercely up, her tones like a serpent's hiss.

"Not dead, Sir Jasper Kingsland! No thanks to you for it! Murderer---as much a murderer as if you had cut her throat---look on her, and be proud of the ruin you have wrought!"

"Silence, woman!" Mr. Green ordered, imperiously. "We will have none of your mad recriminations here. She is not dead, Sir Jasper, but she is dying, I think. This young woman wishes to remove her---whither, I know not---but it is simply impossible. That unfortunate creature will not be alive when to-morrow dawns."

"What do you propose doing with her?" the baronet asked, steadily.

"We will convey her to the sexton's house---it is very near. I have sent Dawson for a stretcher; he and Humphreys will carry her. This young woman declines to give her name, or tell who she is, or where she lives."

"Where I live is no affair of yours, if I can not take my mother there," the young woman answered, sullenly. "Who I am, you know. I told you I am this woman's daughter."

"And a gypsy, I take it?" said Mr. Green.

"You guess well, sir, but only half the truth. Half gypsy I am, and half gentlewoman. A mongrel, I suppose, that makes; and yet it is well to have good blood in one's veins, even on the father's side."

There was a sneering emphasis in her words, and the snaky black eyes gleamed like daggers on the baronet.

But that proud face was set and rigid as stone now. He returned her look with a haughty stare.

"It is a pity the whipping-post has been abolished," he said, harshly. "Your impertinence makes you a fit subject for it, mistress! Take care we don't commit you to prison as a public vagrant, and teach that tongue of yours a little civility when addressing your betters."

"My betters!" the girl hissed, in a fierce, sibilant whisper. "Why, yes, I suppose a daughter should look upon a father in that light. As to the whipping-post and prison, try it at your peril! Try it, if you dare, Sir Jasper."

Before he could speak the door opened, and Dawson entered with the stretcher.

"Lay her upon it and remove her at once," the rector said. "Here, Humphreys, this side. Gently, my men---gently. Be very careful on the way."

The two men placed the seemingly lifeless form of Zenith on the stretcher and bore her carefully away.

The daughter Zara followed.

"She will not live until to-morrow morning," the rector said; "and it is better so, poor soul! She is evidently hopelessly insane."

"And the daughter appears but little better. By the way, Mr. Green, Lady Kingsland desires me to fetch you back to dinner."

The rector bowed.

"Her ladyship is very good. Has your carriage gone? I will order out the pony-phaeton, if you like."

Ten minutes later the two gentlemen were bowling along the pleasant country road leading to the Court. It was a very silent drive, for the baronet sat moodily staring at vacancy, his mouth set in hard, wordless pain.

"They will tell Olivia," he was thinking, gloomily. "What will she say to all this?"

But his fears seemed groundless. Lady Kingsland treated the matter with cool indifference. To be sure, she had not heard quite all. A madwoman had burst into the church, had terrified Lady Helen pretty nearly to death with her crazy language, and had tried to tear away the baby. That was the discreet story my lady heard, and which she was disposed to treat with calm surprise. Baby was safe, and it had ended in nothing; the madwoman was being properly cared for. Lady Kingsland quietly dismissed the incident altogether before the end of dinner.

The hours of the evening wore on---very long hours to the lord of Kingsland Court, seated at the head of his table, dispensing his hospitalities and trying to listen to the long stories of Mr. Carlyon and the rector.

It was worse in the drawing-room, with the lights and the music, and his stately wife at the piano, and Lady Helen at his side, prattling with little Mildred over a pile of engravings. All the time, in a half-distracted sort of way, his thoughts were wandering to the sexton's cottage and the woman dying therein---the woman he had thought dead years ago---dying there in desolation and misery---and here the hours seemed strung on roses.

It was all over at last. The guests were gone, the baby baronet slept in his crib, and Lady Kingsland had gone to her chamber. But Sir Jasper lingered still---wandering up and down the long drawing-room like a restless ghost.

A clock on the mantel chimed twelve. Ere its last chime had sounded a sleepy valet stood in the doorway.

"A messenger for you, Sir Jasper---sent by the Reverend Mr. Green. Here---come in."

Thus invoked, Mr. Dawson entered, pulling his forelock.

"Parson, he sent me, zur. She be a-doying, she be."

He knew instantly who the man meant.

"And she wishes to see me?"

"She calls for you all the time, zur. She be a-doying uncommon hard. Parson bid me come and tell 'ee."

"Very well, my man," the baronet said. "That will do. I will go at once. Thomas, order my horse, and fetch my riding-cloak and gloves."

The valet stared in astonishment, but went to obey. It was something altogether without precedent, this queer proceeding on the part of his master, and, taken in connection with that other odd event in church, looked remarkably suspicious.

The night was dark and starless, and the wind blew raw and bleak as the baronet dashed down the avenue and out into the high-road. He almost wondered at himself for complying with the dying woman's desire, but some inward impulse beyond his control seemed driving him on.

He rode rapidly, and a quarter of an hour brought him to the sexton's cottage. A feeble light glimmered from the window out into the blackness of the night. A moment later and he stood within, in the presence of the dying.

The Reverend Cyrus Green sat by the table, a Bible in his hand. Kneeling by the bedside, her face ghastly white, her burning black eyes dry and tearless, was the young woman. And like a dead woman already, stretched on the bed, lay Zenith.

But she was not dead. At the sound of the opening door, at the sound of his entrance, she opened her eyes, dulling fast in death, and fixed them on Sir Jasper.

"I knew you would come," she said, in a husky whisper. "You dare not stay away! The spirit of the dying Zenith drove you here in spite of yourself. Come nearer---nearer! Sir Jasper Kingsland, don't hover aloof. Once you could never be near enough. Ah, I was young and fair then! I'm old and ugly now. Come nearer, for I can not speak aloud, and listen. Do you know why I have sent for you?"

He had approached the bedside. She caught his hand and held it in a vise-like clutch.

"No," he said, recoiling.

"To give you my dying malediction---to curse you with my latest breath! I hate you, Sir Jasper Kingsland, falsest of all mankind! and if the dead can return and torment the living, then do you beware of me!"

She spoke in panting gasps, the death-rattle sounding in her skinny throat. Shocked and scandalized, the rector interposed:

"My good woman, don't---for pity's sake, don't say such horrible things!"

But she never heeded him.

"I hate you!" she said, with a last effort. "I die hating you, and I curse you with a dying woman's curse! May your life be a life of torment and misery and remorse! May your son's life be blighted and ruined! May he become an outcast among men! May sin and shame follow him forever, and all of his abhorred race!"

Her voice died away. She glared helplessly up from the pillow. A deep, stern, terrible "Amen!" came from her daughter's lips; then, with a spasm, she half leaped from the bed, and fell back with a gurgling cry---dead!

"She is gone!" said the rector, with a shudder. "Heaven have mercy on her sinful soul!"

The baronet staggered back from the bed.

"I never saw a more horrible sight!" continued the Reverend Cyrus. "I never heard such horrible words! No wonder it has unmanned you, Sir Jasper. Pray sit down and drink this."

He held out a glass of water. Sir Jasper seized and drank it, his brain reeling.

With stoical calm, Zara had arisen and closed the dead woman's eyes, folded the hands, straightened the stiffening limbs, and composed the humble covering. She had no tears, she uttered no cry--her face was stern as stone.

"Better stay in this ghastly place no longer, Sir Jasper," the rector suggested. "You look completely overcome. I will see that everything is properly done. We will bury her to-morrow."

As a man walks in a dreadful dream, Sir Jasper arose, quitted the room, mounted his horse, and rode away.

One dark, menacing glance Zara shot after him; then she sat stonily down by her dead. All that night, all next day, Zara kept her post, neither eating, nor drinking, nor sleeping. Dry and tearless, the burning black eyes fixed themselves on the dead face, and never left it.

When they put the dead woman in the rude board coffin, she offered no resistance. Calmly she watched them screw the lid down--calmly she saw them raise it on their shoulders and bear it away. Without a word or tear she arose, folded her cloak about her, and followed them to the church-yard.

One by one the stragglers departed, and Zara was left alone by the new-made grave. No, not quite alone, for through the bleak twilight fluttered the tall, dark figure of a man toward her. She lifted her gloomy eyes and recognized him.

"You come, Sir Jasper," she said, slowly, "to see the last of your work. You come to gloat over your dead victim, and exult that she is out of your way. But I tell you to beware! Zenith in her grave will be a thousand times more terrible to you than Zenith ever was alive!"

The baronet looked at her with a darkly troubled face.

"Why do you hate me so?" he said. "Whatever wrong I did her, I never wronged you."

"You have done me deadly wrong! My mother's wrongs are mine, and here, by her grave, I vow vengeance on you and yours! Her dying legacy to me was her hatred of you, and I will pay the old debt with double interest, my noble, haughty, titled father!"

She turned with the last words and sped away like an evil spirit, vanishing in the gloom among the graves.

CHAPTER VI.

Two dying bequests.

This midsummer night was sultry and still. The darkness was like the darkness of Egypt, lighted every now and then by a vivid flash of lightning, from what quarter of the heavens no man knew. The inky sky was invisible--no breath of air stirred the terrible calm. The midsummer night was full of dark and deadly menace.

Hours ago a fierce and wrathful sunset had burned itself out on a brassy sky. The sun, a lurid ball of fire, had sunk in billows of blood-red cloud, and pitch blackness had fallen upon earth and sky and sea. Everything above and below breathed of speedy tempest, but the midnight was drawing near, and the storm had not yet burst.

And on this black June night Sir Jasper Kingsland lay on his stately bed, dying.

The lofty chamber was but dimly lighted. It was a grand, vast room, paneled in black oak, hung with somber draperies, and carpeted in rich dark Brussels.

Three wax candles made white spots of light in the solemn gloom; a wood-fire burned or rather smoldered, in the wide hearth, for the vast rooms were chilly even in midsummer; but neither fire-light nor candle-light could illumine the ghostly depths of the chamber. Shadows crouched like evil things in the dusky corners, and round the bed, only darker shadows among the rest, knelt the dying man's family--wife and daughter and son. And hovering aloof, with pale, anxious faces, stood the rector, the Reverend Cyrus Green, and Doctor Parker Godroy.

The last hope was over, the last prayer had been said, the last faint breaths uttered between the dying lips. With the tide going out on the shore below, the baronet's life was ebbing.

"Olivia!"

Lady Kingsland, kneeling in tearless grief by her husband's side, bent over him to catch the faint whisper.

"My dearest, I am here. What is it?"

"Where is Everard?"

Everard Kingsland, a fair-haired, blue-eyed, handsome boy, lifted his head from the opposite side. It was a handsome, high-bred face---the ancestral face of all the Kingslands---that of this twelve-year-old boy.

"Here, papa!"

"My boy! my boy! whom I have loved so well---whom I have shielded so tenderly. My precious, only son, I must leave you at last!"

The boy stifled a sob as he bent and kissed the ice-cold face. Young as he was, he had the gravity and self-repression of manhood already.

"I have loved you better than my own life," the faint, whispering voice went on. "I would have died to save you an hour of pain. I have kept the one secret of my life well---a secret that has blighted it before its time---but I can not face the dread unknown and bear my secret with me. On my death-bed I must tell all, and my darling boy must bear the blow."

Everard Kingsland listened to his father's huskily murmured words in boyish wonderment. What secret was he talking of? He glanced across at his mother, and saw her pale cheeks suddenly flushed and her calm eyes kindling.

"No living soul has ever heard from me what I must tell you to-night, my Everard---not even your mother. Do not leave me, Olivia. You, too, must know all that you may guard your son---that you may pity and forgive me. Perhaps I have erred in keeping any secret from you, but the truth was too horrible to tell. There have been times when the thought of it nearly drove me mad. How, then, could I tell the wife I loved---the son I idolized---this cruel and shameful thing?"

The youthful Everard looked simply bewildered---Lady Kingsland excited, expectant, flushed.

She gently wiped the clammy brow and held a reviving cordial to the livid lips.

"My dearest, do not agitate yourself," she said. "We will listen to all you have to say, and love you none the less, let it be what it will."

"My own dear wife! half the secret you know already. You remember the astrologer---the prediction?"

"Surely. You have never been the same man since that fatal night. It is of the prediction you would speak?"

"It is. I must tell my son. I must warn him of the unutterable horror to come. Oh, my boy! my boy! what will become of you when you learn your horrible doom?"

"Papa," the lad said, softly, but growing very white, "I don't understand---what horror? what doom? Tell me, and see how I will bear it. I am a Kingsland, you know, and the son of a daring race."

"That is my brave boy! Send them out of the room, Olivia---priest, doctor, Mildred, and all---then come close to me, close, close, for my voice is failing---and listen."

Lady Kingsland arose---fair and stately still as twelve years before, and eminently self-sustained in this trying hour. In half a minute she had turned out rector, physician, and daughter, and knelt again by that bed of death.

"The first part of my story, Olivia," began the dying man, "belongs to you. Years before I knew you, when I was a young, hot-headed, rashly impulsive boy, traveling in Spain, I fell in with a gang of wandering gypsies. I had been robbed and wounded by mountain brigands; those gypsies found me, took me to their tents, cared for me, cured me. But long after I was well I lingered with them, for the fairest thing the sun shone on was my black-eyed nurse, Zenith. We were both so young and so fiery-blooded, so---Ah! what need to go over the old, old grounds? There was one hour of mad, brief bliss, parting and forgetfulness. I forgot. Life was a long, idle summer holiday to me. But she never forgot---never forgave! You remember the woman, Olivia, who burst into the church on the day of our boy's christening---the woman who died in the sexton's house? That woman was Zenith---old and withered, and maddened by her wrongs---that woman who died cursing me and mine. A girl, dark and fierce, and terrible as herself, stood by her to the last, lingered at her grave to vow deathless revenge---her daughter and mine!"

The faint voice ceased an instant. The fluttering spirit rallied, and resumed:

"I have reason to know that daughter was married. I have reason to know she had a child---whether boy or girl I can not tell. To that child the inheritance of hatred and revenge will fall; that child, some inward prescience tells me, will wreak deep and awful vengeance for the past. Beware of the grandchild of Zenith, the gypsy---beware, Olivia, for yourself and your son!"

"Is this all?" Olivia said, in a constrained, hard voice.

"All I have to say to you---the rest is for Everard. My son, on the night of your birth an Eastern astrologer came to this house and cast your horoscope. He gave that horoscope to me at day-dawn and departed, and from that hour to this I have neither seen nor heard of him. Before reading your future in the stars he looked into my palm and told me the past---told me the story of Zenith and her wrongs---told me what no one under heaven but myself knew. My boy, the revelation of that night has blighted my life---broken my heart! The unutterable horror of your future has brought my gray hairs to the grave. Oh, my son! what will become of you when I am gone?"

"What was it, papa?" the lad asked. "What has the future in store for me?"

A convulsive spasm distorted the livid face; the eye-balls rolled, the death-rattle sounded. With a smothered cry of terror Lady Kingsland lifted the agonized head in her arms.

"Quick, Jasper---the horoscope! Where?"

"My safe---study---secret spring---at back! Oh, God, have mercy---"

The clock struck sharply---twelve. A vivid blaze of lambent lightning lighted the room; the awful death-rattle sounded once more.

"Beware of Zenith's grandchild!"

He spoke the words aloud, clear and distinct, and never spoke again.

* * * * *

Many miles away from Kingsland Court, that same sultry, oppressive midsummer night a little third-rate theater on the Surrey side of London was crowded to overflowing. There was a grand spectacular drama, full of transformation scenes, fairies, demons, spirits of air, fire, and water; a brazen orchestra blowing forth, and steam, and orange-peel, and suffocation generally.

Foremost among all the fairies and nymphs, noted for the shortness of her filmy skirts, the supple beauty of her shapely limbs, her incomparable dancing, and her dark, bright beauty, flashed La Sylphine before the foot-lights.

The best *danseuse* in the kingdom, and the prettiest, and invested with a magic halo of romance, La Sylphine shone like a meteor among lesser stars, and brought down thunders of applause every time she appeared.

The little feet twinkled and flashed; the long, dark waves of hair floated in a shining banner behind her to the tiny waist; the pale, upraised face---the eyes ablaze like black stars! Oh, surely La Sylphine was the loveliest thing, that hot June night, the gas-light shone on!

The fairy spectacle was over---the green drop-curtain fell. La Sylphine had smiled and dipped and kissed hands to thundering bravos for the last time that night, and now, behind the scenes, was rapidly exchanging the spangles and gossamer of fairydom for the shabby and faded merino shawl and dingy straw hat of every-day life.

"You danced better than ever to-night, Miss Monti," a tall demon in tail and horns said, sauntering up to her. "Them there pretty feet of your'n will make your fortune yet, and beat Fanny Ellsler!"

"Not to mention her pretty face," said a brother fiend, removing his mask. "Her fortune's made already, if she's a mind to take it. There's a gay young city swell a-waiting at the wings to see you home, Miss Monti."

"Is it Maynard, the banker's son?" she asked.

The second demon nodded.

"Then I must escape by the side entrance. When he gets tired waiting, Mr. Smithers, give him La Sylphine's compliments, and let him go."

She glided past the demons down a dark and winding staircase, and out into the noisy, lighted street.

The girl paused an instant under a street-lamp---she was only a girl---fifteen or sixteen at most, though very tall, with a bright, fearless look---then drawing her shawl closely round her, she flitted rapidly away.

The innumerable city clocks tolled heavily---eleven. The night was pitch-dark; the sheet-lightning blazed across the blackness, and now and then a big drop fell. Still the girl sped on until she reached her destination.

It was the poorest and vilest quarter of the great city---among reeking smells, and horrible sounds, and disgusting sights. The house she entered was tottering to decay---a dreadful den by day and by night, thronged with the very scum of the London streets. Up and up a long stair-way she flew, paused at a door on the third landing, opened it, and went in.

It was a miserable room---all one could have expected from the street and the house. There was a black grate, one or two broken chairs, a battered table, and a wretched bed in the corner. On the bed a woman---the ghastly skeleton of a woman---lay dying.

The entrance of La Sylphine aroused the woman from the stupor into which she had fallen. She opened her spectral eyes and looked eagerly around.

"My Sunbeam! is it thou?"

"It is I, mother---at last. I could come no sooner. The ballet was very long to-night."

"And my Sunbeam was bravoed, and encored, and crowned with flowers, was she not?"

"Yes, mother; but never mind that. How are you tonight?"

"Dying, my own."

The *danseuse* fell on her knees with a shrill, sharp cry.

"No, mother---no, no! Not dying! Very ill, very weak, very low, but not dying. Oh, not dying!"

"Dying, my daughter!" the sick woman said. "I count my life by minutes now; I heard the city clocks strike eleven; I counted the strokes, for, my Sunbeam, it is the last hour thy mother will ever hear on earth."

The ballet-dancer covered her face, with a low, despairing cry. The dying mother, with a painful effort, lifted her own skeleton hand and removed those of the girl.

"Weep not, but listen, *carissima*. I have much to say to thee before I go; I feared to die before you came; and even in my grave I could not rest with the words I must say unsaid. I have a legacy to leave thee, my daughter."

"A legacy?"

The girl opened her great black eyes in wide surprise.

"Even so. Not of lands, or houses, or gold, or honors, but something a thousand-fold greater---an inheritance of hatred and revenge!"

"My mother!"

"Listen to me, my daughter, and my dying malediction be upon thee if thou fulfilllest not the trust. Thou hast heard the name of Kingsland?"

"Ay, often; from my father ere he died---from thee, since. Was it not his last command to me---this hatred of their evil race? Did I not promise him on his death-bed, four years ago? Does my mother think I forget?"

"That is my brave daughter. You know the cruel story of treachery and wrong done thy grandmother, Zenith---you know the prediction your father made to my father, Sir Jasper Kingsland, on the night of his son's birth. Be it thine, my brave daughter, to see that prediction fulfilled."

"You ask a terrible thing, my mother," she said, slowly; but I can refuse you nothing, and I abhor them all. I promise---the prediction shall be fulfilled!"

"My own! my own! That son is a boy of twelve now---be it yours to find him, and work the retribution of the gods. Your grandmother, your father, your mother, look to you from their graves for vengeance. Woe to you if you fail!"

"I shall not fail!" the girl said, solemnly. "I can die, but I can not break a promise. Vengeance shall fall, fierce and terrible, upon the heir of Kingsland, and mine shall be the hand to inflict it. I swear it by your death-bed, mother, and I will keep my oath!"

The mother pressed her hand. The film of death was in her eyes. She strove to speak; there was a quick, dreadful convulsion, then an awful calm.

Within the same hour, with miles between them, Sir Jasper Kingsland and Zara, his outcast daughter, died.

* * * * *

The dawn of another day crept silently over the Devon hill-tops as Lady Kingsland arose from her husband's deathbed.

White, and stark, and rigid, the late lord of Kingsland Court lay in the awful majesty of death.

The doctor, the rector, the nurse, sat, pale and somber watchers, in the death-room. More than an hour before the youthful baronet had been sent to his room, worn out with his night's watching.

It was the Reverend Cyrus Green who urged my lady now to follow him.

"You look utterly exhausted, my dear Lady Kingsland," he said. "Pray retire and endeavor to sleep. You are not able to endure such fatigue."

"I am worn out," she said. "I believe I will lie down, but I feel as though I should never sleep again."

She quitted the room, but not to seek her own. Outside the death-chamber she paused an instant, and her face lighted suddenly.

"Now is my time," she said, under her breath. "A few hours more and it may be too late. His safe, he said---the secret spring!"

She flitted away, pallid and guilty looking, into Sir Jasper's study. It was deserted, of course, and there in the corner stood the grim iron safe.

"Now for the secrets of the dead! No fortune-telling jugglery shall blight my darling boy's life while I can help it. He is as superstitious as his father."

With considerable difficulty she opened the safe, pulled forth drawer after drawer, until the grim iron back was exposed.

"The secret spring is here," she muttered. "Surely, surely, I can find it."

For many minutes she searched in vain; then her glance fell on a tiny steel knob inserted in a corner. She pressed this with all her might, confident of success.

Nor was she deceived; the knob moved, the iron slid slowly back, disclosing a tiny hidden drawer.

Lady Kingsland barely repressed a cry as she saw the paper, and by its side something wrapped in silver tissue. Greedily she snatched both out, pressed back the knob, locked the safe, stole out of the study and up to her own room.

Panting with her haste, my lady sunk into a seat, with her treasures eagerly clutched. A moment recovered her; then she took up the little parcel wrapped in the silver paper.

"He said nothing of this," she thought. "What can it be?"

She tore off the wrapping. As it fell to the floor, a long tress of silky black hair fell with it, and she held in her hand a miniature painted on ivory. A girlish face of exquisite beauty, dusky as the face of an Indian queen, looked up at her, fresh and bright as thirty years before. No need to look at the words on the reverse---"My peerless Zenith"---to know who it was; the wife's jealousy told her at the first glance.

"And all these years he has kept this," she said, between her set teeth, "while he pretended he loved only me! 'My peerless Zenith!' Yes, she is beautiful as the fabled houris of the Mussulman's paradise. Well, I will keep it in my turn. Who knows what end it may serve yet?"

She picked up the tress of hair, and enveloped all in the silver paper once more. Then she lifted the folded document, and looked darkly at the superscription:

"Horoscope of the Heir of Kingsland."

"Which the heir of Kingsland shall never see," she said, grimly unfolding it. "Now for this mighty secret."

She just glanced at the mystic symbols, the cabalistic signs and figures, and turned to the other side. There, beautifully written, in long, clear letters, she saw her son's fate.

The morning wore on---noon came; the house was as still as a tomb. Rosine, my lady's maid, with a cup of tea, ventured to tap at her ladyship's door. There was no response.

"She sleeps," thought Rosine, and turned the handle.

But at the threshold she paused in wild alarm. No, my lady did not sleep. She sat in her chair, upright and ghastly as a galvanized corpse, a written paper closely clutched in her hand, and a look of white horror frozen on her face.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER TEN YEARS.

"I have said it, and I mean it; they ought to know me well enough by this time, Godsoe. I'd transport every man of them, the poaching scoundrels, if I could! Tell that villain Dick Darkly that the first time I catch him at his old tricks he shall follow the brother he makes such a howling about, and share his fate."

Sir Everard Kingsland was the speaker. He stood with one hand, white and shapely as a lady's, resting on the glossy neck of his bay horse, his fair, handsome face, flushed with anger, turned upon his gamekeeper.

Peter Godsoe, the sturdy gamekeeper, standing before his young master, hat in hand, looked up deprecatingly.

"He takes it very hard, Sir Everard, that you sent his brother to Worrel Jail. His missis was sick, and two of the children had the measles, and Will Darkly he'd been out o' work, and they was poor as poor. So he turns to and snares the rabbits, and---"

"Godsoe, are you trying to excuse this convicted poacher? Is that what you stopped me here to say?"

"I beg your pardon, Sir Everard; I only wanted to warn you---to put you on your guard---"

"To warn me---to put me on my guard? What do you mean? Has that villainous poacher dared to threaten me?"

"Not in my hearing, sir; but others say so. And he's a dark, vindictive brute; and he swore a solemn oath, they say, when his brother went to Worrel Jail, to be revenged upon you. And so, Sir Everard, begging your pardon for the freedom, I thought as how you was likely to be out late to-night, coming home from my lord's, and as Brithlow Wood is lonesome and dark---"

"That will do, Godsoe!" the young baronet interrupted, haughtily. "You mean well, I dare say, and I overlook your presumption this time; but never proffer advice to me again. As for Darkly, he had better keep out of my way. I'll horsewhip him the first time I see him, and send him to make acquaintance with the horse-pond afterward."

He vaulted lightly into the saddle as he spoke.

The brawny gamekeeper stood gazing after him as he ambled down the leafy avenue.

"His father's son," he said; "the proudest gentleman in Devonshire, and the most headstrong. You'll horsewhip Dick Darkly, Sir Everard! Why, he could take you with one hand by the waist-band, and lay you low in the kennel any day he liked! And he'll do it, too!" muttered Godsoe, turning slowly away. "You won't be warned, and you won't take precaution, and you won't condescend to be afeard, and you'll come to grief afore you know it."

The misty autumn twilight lay like a veil of silver blue over the peaceful English landscape; a cool breeze swept up from the sea over the golden downs and distant hills, and as Sir Everard rode along through the village, the cloud left his face, and a tender, dreamy look came in its place.

"She will be present, of course," he thought. "I wonder if I shall find her as I left her last? She is not the kind that play fast and loose, my stately, uplifted Lady Louise. How queenly she looked at the reception last night in those velvet robes and the Carteret diamonds!---'queen rose of the rose-bud garden of girls.' She is my elder by three round years at least, but she is stately as a princess, and at twenty-five preserves the ripe bloom of eighteen. She is all that is gracious when we meet, and my mother has set her heart upon the match. I have half a mind to propose this very night."

She was an earl's daughter, this stately Lady Louise, but so very impoverished an earl that the young Devonshire baronet, with his ancient name and his long rent-roll, was a most desirably brilliant match.

She was down on a visit to her brother, Lord Carteret, and had made a dead set at Sir Everard Kingsland from the hour she had met him first. He was on his way to Lord Carteret's now. There was a dinner-party, and he was an honored guest; and Lady Louise was brilliant, in the family diamonds and old point lace, once more.

She was in the drawing-room when he entered---her stately head regally uplifted in the midst of a group of less magnificent demoiselles---a statuesque blonde, with abundant ringlets of flaxen lightness, eyes of turquoise blue, and a determined mouth and chin.

Sir Everard paid his respects to his host and hostess, and sought her side at once.

"Almost late," she said, with a brilliant, welcoming smile, giving him her dainty little hand; "and George Grosvenor has been looking this way, and pulling his mustache and blushing redder than the carnations in his button-hole. He wants to take me in to dinner, poor fellow, and he hasn't the courage to do it."

"With your kind permission, Lady Louise, I will save him the trouble," answered Sir Everard Kingsland. "Grosvenor is not singular in his wish, but I never gave him credit for so much good taste before."

"Mr. Grosvenor is more at home in the hunting-field than the drawing-room, I fancy. Apropos, Sir Everard, I ride to the meet to-morrow. Of course you will be present on your 'bonny bay' to display your prowess?"

"Of course---a fox-hunt is to me a foretaste of celestial bliss. With a first-rate horse, a crack pack of hounds, a 'good scent,' and a fine morning, a man is tempted to wish life could last forever. And you are only going to ride to the meet, then, Lady Louise?"

"Yes; I never followed the hounds, I don't know the country and I can't ride to points. Besides, I am not really Amazonian enough to fancy a scamper across the country, flying fences and risking my precious neck."

"I must own that, to me, a lady never looks less attractive than in a hunting-field, among yelping hounds, and shouts, and cheers, and cords and tops, and scarlet coats."

"That comes of being a poet and an artist; and Sir Everard Kingsland is accused of being both. You want to fancy us all angels, and you can not reconcile an angelic being with a side-saddle and a hard gallop. Now, I don't own to being anything in the Di Vernon line myself, and I don't wish to be; but I do think a pretty girl never looks half so pretty as when well mounted. You should have seen Harrie Hunsden, as I saw her the other day, and you would surely recant your heresy about ladies and horse-flesh."

"Is Harrie Hunsden a lady?"

"Certainly. Don't you know her? She is Captain Hunsden's only daughter---Hunsden, of Hunsden Hall, one of your oldest Devon families. You'll find them duly chronicled in Burke and Debrett. Miss Hunsden is scarcely eighteen, but she has been over the world---from Quebec to Gibraltar---from Halifax to Calcutta. Two years of her life she passed at a New York boarding-school, of which city her mother was a native."

"Indeed!" Sir Everard said, just lifting his eyebrows. "And Miss Hunsden rides well?"

"Like Di Vernon's self."

"Is your Miss Hunsden pretty? and shall we see her at the meet to-morrow?"

"Yes to both questions; and more than at the meet, I fancy. She and her thorough-bred, Whirlwind, will lead you all. Her scarlet habit and 'red roan steed' are as well known in the country as the duke's hounds, and her bright eyes and dashing style have taken by storm the hearts of half the fox-hunting squires of Devonshire."

She laughed a little maliciously. Truth to tell, not being quite sure that her game was safely wired, and dreading this Amazonian Miss Hunsden as a prospective rival, she was nothing loath to prejudice the fastidious young baronet beforehand, even while seeming to praise her.

"I am surprised that you have not heard of her," she said. "Sir Harcourt Helford and Mr. Cholmondeley actually fought a duel about her, and it ended in her telling them to their faces they were a pair of idiots, and flatly refusing both. 'The Hunsden' is the toast of the country."

Sir Everard shuddered.

"From all such the gods deliver us! You honor Miss Hunsden with your deepest interest, I think, Lady Louise?"

"Yes, she is such an oddity. Her wandering life, I presume, accounts for it; but she is altogether unlike any girl I ever know. I am certain," with a little malicious glance, "she will be your style, Sir Everard."

"And as I don't in the least know what my style is, perhaps you may be right."

Lady Louise bit her lip---it was a rebuff, she fancied, for her detraction. And then Lady Carteret gave that mysterious signal, and the ladies rose and swept away in billows of silk to the drawing-room, and the gentlemen had the talk to themselves "across the walnuts and the wine."

To one gentleman present the interim before rejoining the ladies was unmitigatedly dull, even though the talk ran on his favorite topics---horse-flesh and hunting. He was in love, he thought complacently, and Lady Louise's eyes had sparkled to-day and her smiles had flashed their bewildering brightness upon him more radiantly than ever before.

"How pleased my mother will be!" Sir Everard thought. "I will ask Lady Louise this very night. An earl's daughter---though a bankrupt---is a fitting mate for a Kingsland."

Lady Louise sat at the piano, the soft light falling full on her pale, statuesque face, and making an aureole around her fair, shapely head.

Sir Everard Kingsland crossed over and stood beside her, and Lord and Lady Carteret exchanged significant glances, and smiled.

It was a very desirable thing, indeed; they had brought Louise down for no other earthly reason; and Louise was playing her cards, and playing them well.

If Sir Everard had one taste stronger than another it was his taste for music, and Lady Louise held him spell-bound now. She played, and her fingers seemed inspired; she sung, and few non-professionals sung like that.

The chain of brittle glass that bound the captive beside her grew stronger. A wife who could bewitch the hours away with such music as this would be no undesirable possession for a *blase* man. He stooped over her as she arose from the piano at last.

"Come out on the balcony," he said. "The night is lovely, and the good people yonder are altogether engrossed in their cards and their small-talk."

Without a word she stepped with him from the open French window out into the starlit night.

What is it that Byron says about solitude, and moonlight, and youth? A dangerous combination, truly; and so Sir Everard Kingsland found, standing side by side with this pale daughter of a hundred earls. But the irrevocable words were not destined to be spoken, for just then George Grosvenor, goaded to jealous desperation, stalked out through the open casement and joined them.

The midnight moon was sailing up to the zenith as Sir Everard rode home. His road was a lonely one through Brithlow Wood, which shortened his journey by over a mile; but his thoughts were pleasant ones, and he hummed, as he rode, the songs Lady Louise had sung.

"Confound that muff, Grosvenor!" he thought. "If it had not been for his impertinent intrusion, the matter would have been safely settled by this time---and settled pleasantly too, I take it; for, without being a conceited noodle, I really think Lady Louise will say yes. Ah! what's this?"

For out of the starlit darkness, from among the trees, started up a giant black figure, and his horse was grasped by the bridle and hurled back upon his haunches.

"You villain," the young man dauntlessly cried, "let go my bridle-rein! Who are you? What do you want?"

"I'm Dick Darkly," answered a deep, gruff voice, "and I want your heart's blood!"

"You poaching scoundrel!" exclaimed Sir Everard, quick as lightning raising his riding-whip and slashing the aggressor across the face. "Let go my horse's head."

With a cry that was like the roar of a wild beast the man sprung hack. The next instant, with a horrible oath, he had seized the young man and torn him out of the saddle.

"I'll tear you limb from limb for that blow, by heavens!" Dick Darkly shouted. "If I hadn't meant to kill you before, I would kill you for that cut of your whip. I've waited for you, Sir Everard Kingsland! I swore revenge, and revenge I'll have! I'll kill you this night, if they hang me for it to-morrow!"

He held his victim in a grip of iron, from which he struggled madly to get free, while the horse, with a shrill neigh of terror, started off riderless.

"I swore I'd kill you, Sir Everard Kingsland," Dick Darkly growled, "when you put my poor brother in Worrel Jail for snaring the miserable rabbits to keep his sick wife and children from starving. I swore it, and I'll keep my oath. You told your gamekeeper this very day you would lash me like a dog, and duck me after. Aha, Sir Everard! Where's the horse-whip and the horse-pond now?"

"Here!" shouted the young baronet; and with a mighty effort he freed his arms, and raising the whip, slashed Dick Darkly for the second time across the face. "You murdering villain, you shall swing for this!"

With a blind roar of pain and rage, the murderer closed with his victim. They grappled, and rolled over and over in each other's arms.

Panting and speechless, the death-struggle went on; but Sir Everard was no match for the burly giant. With a savage cry, the huge poacher thrust his hand into his belt, and a long, blue-bladed knife gleamed in the moon's rays.

"At last!" he panted. "I'll have your heart's blood, as I swore I'd have it!"

He lifted the knife. Sir Everard Kingsland tried to gasp one last brief prayer in that supreme moment.

"Help!" he cried, with a last wild struggle--—"help! help! murder!"

There was a rustling in the trees and some one sprung out. The last word was lost in the sharp report of a pistol, and with a scream of agony, Dick Darkly dropped his knife and fell backward on the grass.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERIOUS YOUNG MAN.

The baronet leaped to his feet, and stood face to face with his preserver. The giant trees, towering up until they seemed to pierce the sky, half shut out the moonlight, but yet Sir Everard could see that it was a slender stripling who stood before him, a slouched hat pulled far over his eyes.

"I owe you my life," he cried, grasping the youth's hand. "An instant later, and I would have been in eternity. How shall I ever thank you?"

"Don't make the attempt," replied the lad, coolly. "It was the merest chance-work in the world that sent me here to-night."

"Don't call it chance, my boy. It was Providence sent you to save a life."

"Providence may have wished to save your life, and was not particular as to the means. Let us look to this fellow. I hope my shot has not killed him outright."

They both stooped over the fallen giant. Dick Darkly lay on his face, groaning dismally, the blood pumping from his chest with every breath.

"It's an ugly-looking hole," said Sir Everard. "Two inches lower, and it would have gone straight through his heart. As it is, it will put a stop to his assassinating proclivities for awhile, I fancy. Lie still, you matchless scoundrel, while I try and stop this flow of blood."

He knelt beside the groaning man and endeavored to stanch the red gushing with his handkerchief. The youth stood by, gazing calmly on.

"What do you mean to do with him?" he asked.

"Send some of my people to take him to his home, and as soon as he is sufficiently recovered to stand his trial for attempted murder---"

"For God's sake, Sir Everard!" faintly moaned the wounded man.

"Ah, you audacious villain, you can supplicate now! If I let you off this time, my life would not be worth an hour's purchase."

"What did he call you?" asked the boy, with sudden, sharp anxiety in his tone. "Whose life have I saved?"

"I am Sir Everard Kingsland, of Kingsland Court," the baronet answered. "And you are---who?"

"Sir Everard Kingsland! And I have saved your life!"

"For which Heaven be praised! It is a very pleasant world, this, and I have no desire just yet to leave it. Pray tell me the name of my preserver!"

"Never mind my name; it is of no consequence who I am. I have a long journey before me; I am very weary and footsore, and it is time I was on my way."

"Weary and footsore?" repeated the baronet. "Nay---then all the more need we should not part. Come home with me and rest---to-night, at least. I owe you a heavy debt, and I should like to pay a little of it."

"You owe me nothing!" His eyes gleamed under his hat and his teeth clinched as he spoke. "Nothing, Sir Everard Kingsland! Let us say good-bye. I must reach Worrel by sunrise."

"And so you shall. The fleetest steed in my stables shall carry you. But come to Kingsland and rest for the night. If you will not accept my thanks, accept at least the shelter of my roof."

The boy seemed to hesitate.

The baronet took advantage of that momentary hesitation and drew his arm through his own. There was not a prouder man in wide England, but this unknown lad had saved his life, and Sir Everard was only two-and-twenty, and full of generous impulses.

"Come," he said, "don't be obstinate. You owe to being footsore and weary. Kingsland is very near, and a night's rest will do you good."

"Thanks! I accept your kind hospitality, Sir Everard, on two conditions."

"On any conditions you choose, *mon ami*. What are they?"

"That no one shall know it but yourself, and that I may depart before day-dawn."

"I dislike that last condition very much; but it must be as you say. Sleep in safety, most mysterious youth; no one shall know you are under my roof, and I will come and wake you myself at the first peep of day. Will that do?"

"Admirably. You are very kind to take all this trouble for a nameless tramp, Sir Everard."

"Am I? Even when the nameless tramp saved my life?"---yet Sir Everard winced a little while saying it. "And that reminds me, we must hasten, if yonder fallen villain is to recover from his wound. His condition is not an enviable one at this moment."

"How did it happen?" the boy asked.

And the young baronet repeated the story of Dick Darkly's provocation and vow of revenge.

As he concluded they passed through the stately gates, up the majestic sweep of drive, to the imposing old mansion.

"Home!" Sir Everard said, gayly. "Solitude and darkness reign, you see. The family have long since retired, and we can pass to our respective dormitories unseen and unheard."

The boy looked up with his brilliant, glowing eyes. But he did not speak. In silence he followed Sir Everard in, up the noble marble stair-way, along richly carpeted, softly lighted corridors, and into a stately chamber.

"You will sleep here," Sir Everard said. "My room is near, and I am a light sleeper. To-morrow morning at five I will rouse you. Until then adieu, and pleasant dreams."

He swung out and closed the door, and not once had he seen the face of his guest. That guest stood in the center of the handsome chamber, and gazed around.

"At last!" he hisses between his set white teeth---"at last, after two years' weary waiting! At last, oh! my mother, the time has come for me to keep my vow!"

He raised one arm with a tragic gesture, removed the slouched hat, and stood uncovered in the tranquil half light.

The face was wonderfully handsome, of gypsy darkness, and the eyes shone like black stars; but a scarlet handkerchief was bound tightly around his head, and concealed every vestige of hair. With a slow smile creeping round his mouth, the boy took his handkerchief off.

"To-morrow he will come and call me, but to-morrow I shall not leave Kingsland Court. No, my dear young baronet, I have not saved your life for nothing! I shall have the honor of remaining your guest for some time."

CHAPTER IX.

MISS SYBILLA SILVER

Meantime Sir Everard had aroused his valet and a brace of tall footmen, and dispatched them to the aid of the wounded man in the wood. And then he sought his own chamber, and, after an hour or two of aimless tossing, dropped into an uneasy sleep.

And sleeping, Sir Everard had a singular dream. He was walking through Brithlow Wood with Lady Louise on his arm, the moonlight sifting through the tall trees as he had seen it last. Suddenly, with a rustle and a hiss, a huge green serpent glided out, reared itself up, and glared at them with eyes of deadly menace. And somehow, though he had not yet seen the lad's face, he knew the hissing serpent and the preserver of his life were one and the same. With horrible hisses the monster encircled him. Its fetid breath was in his face, its deadly fangs ready to strike his death-blow, and, with a suffocating cry, Sir Everard a-woke from his nightmare and started up in bed.

"Good heavens! such a night of horrors, waking and sleeping! A most ungrateful dream, truly! It is time I awoke my unknown preserver."

The mysterious youth lay fast asleep upon the bed, dressed as he had left him, with the exception of the slouched hat and the red cotton handkerchief. They lay on the carpet; and over the pillows, and over the coarse velveteen jacket streamed such a wealth of blue-black hair as the baronet in all his life never before beheld.

"Powers above!" Sir Everard gasped, in his utter amaze, "what can this mean?"

He advanced with bated breath, bent over and gazed at the sleeper's face. One look, and his flashing first suspicion was a certainty. This dark, youthful, faultlessly beautiful face was a woman's face. A girl in velveteen shooting-jacket and pantaloons, handsome as some dusky Indian princess, lay asleep before him.

Sir Everard Kingsland, in the last stage of bewilderment and amaze, retreated precipitately and shut the door.

The instant the chamber door closed the mysterious young man raised himself on his elbow, very wide awake, his handsome face lighted with a triumphant smile.

"So," he said, "step the second has been taken, and Sir Everard has discovered the sex of his preserver. As he is too delicate to disturb a slumbering lady in disguise, the slumbering lady must disturb him!"

He---or rather she---leaped lightly off the bed, picked up the scarlet bandanna, twisted scientifically the abundant black hair, bound it up with the handkerchief, and crushed down over all the slouched hat. Then, with the handsome face overshadowed, and all expression screwed out of it, she opened the door, and saw, as she expected, the young baronet in the passage.

He stopped at once at sight of her. He had been walking up and down, with an exceedingly surprised and perplexed face; and now he stood with his great, Saxon-blue eyes piercingly fixed upon the young person in velveteen, whose jacket and trousers told one story, and whose streaming dark hair told quite another.

"It is past sunrise, Sir Everard," his preserver began, with a reproachful glance, "and you have broken your promise. You said you would awake me."

"I beg your pardon," retorted Sir Everard, quietly; "I have broken no promise. I came to your room ten minutes ago to arouse you, as I said I would. I knocked thrice, and received no reply. Then I entered. You must excuse me for doing so. How was I to know I was entertaining angels unaware?"

With a low cry of consternation his hearer's hands flew up and covered his face, to hide the blushes that were not there.

"Your red handkerchief and hat do you good service in your masquerade, mademoiselle. I confess I should never suspect a lady in that suit of velveteen."

With a sudden theatrical abandon the "lady in velveteen" flung herself on her knees at his feet.

"Forgive me!" she cried, holding up her clasped hands. "Have pity on me! Don't reveal my secret, for Heaven's sake."

"Forgive you!" repeated Sir Everard, hastily. "What have I to forgive? Pray get up; there is no reason you should kneel and supplicate pity from me."

He raised her imperatively. Her head dropped in womanly confusion, and, hiding her face, she sobbed.

"What must you think? How dreadful it must look! But, oh, Sir Everard! if you only knew!"

"I should like to know, I confess. Come here in this window recess and tell me, won't you? Come, look up, and don't cry so. Tell me who you are."

"I am Sybilla Silver, and I have run away from home, and I will die sooner than ever go back!"

She looked up with a passionate outbreak, and Sir Everard saw the splendor of a pair of flashing Spanish eyes.

"I shall not send you back, depend upon it. Why did you run away, Miss Silver?"

"Do you really wish to know?" she asked. "Oh, Sir Everard Kingsland, will you indeed be my friend?"

"Your true and faithful friend, my poor girl!" he answered, moved by the piteous appeal. "Surely I could hardly be less to one who so bravely saved my life."

"Ah! that was nothing. I lay no claim on that. Serve me as you would serve any friendless girl in distress; and you are brave and generous and noble, I know."

"You 'do me proud,' mademoiselle. Suppose you cease complimenting, and begin at the beginning. Who are your friends, and why did you leave them, and where have you run away from?"

"From Yorkshire, Sir Everard--yes, all the way from Yorkshire in this disguise. Ah! it seems very bold and unwomanly, does it not? But my uncle was such a tyrant, and I had no appeal. I am an orphan, Sir Everard. My father and mother have been dead since my earliest recollection, and this uncle, my sole earthly relative, has been my guardian and tormentor. I can not tell you how cruelly he has treated me. I have been immured in a desolate old country-house, without friends or companions of my own age or sex, and left to drag on a useless and aimless life. My poor father left me a scant inheritance; but, such as it is, my uncle set his greedy heart upon adding it to his own. To do this, he determined upon marrying me to his only son. My cousin William was his father over again--meaner, more cruel and crafty and cold-blooded, if possible--and utterly abhorred by me. I would sooner have died ten thousand deaths than marry such a sordid, hateful wretch! But marry him I surely must have done, if I remained in their power. So I fled. With inconceivable trouble and maneuvering. I obtained this suit of clothes. If I fled undisguised, I knew I would certainly be pursued, overtaken, and brought back. In the dead of night I opened my chamber window and made my escape. I took a loaded pistol of my uncle's with me; I knew how to use it, and I felt safe with such a protector. My old nurse lived in Plymouth with her daughter, and to her I meant to go. I had a little money with me, and made good my escape. My disguise saved me from suspicion and insult. Last night, on my way to Worrel, I heard your cry for help, and my pistol stood me in good stead, for the first time. There, Sir Everard, you know all. I hate and despise myself for the dress I wear, but surely there is some excuse to be made for me."

The Spanish eyes, swimming in tears, were raised imploringly to his, and Sir Everard was two-and-twenty, and very susceptible to a beautiful woman's tears.

"Very much excuse, my poor girl," he said, warmly. "I am the last on earth to blame you for flying from a detested marriage. But there is no need to wear this disguise longer, surely?"

"No; no need. But I have had no opportunity of changing it; and if I do not succeed in finding my nurse at Plymouth, I don't know what will become of me."

"Have you not her address?"

"No; neither have I heard from her in a long, long time. She lived in Plymouth years ago with her married daughter, but we never corresponded; and whether she is there now, or whether indeed she is living at all, I do not know. I caught at the hope as the drowning catch at straws."

Sir Everard looked at her in that thoughtful pause. How beautiful she was in her dark, glowing girlhood---how friendless, how desolate in the world.

"It would be the wildest of wild-geese chases, then," he said, "knowing as little of your nurse's whereabouts as you do, to seek her in Plymouth now. Write first, or advertise in the local journals. If she is still resident there, that will fetch her."

"Write! advertise!" Sybilla Silver repeated, with unspeakable mournfulness; "from whence, Sir Everard?"

"From here," answered the baronet, decidedly. "You shall not leave here until you find your friends. And you shall not wear this odious disguise an hour longer. Go back to your chamber and wait."

"What an egregious muff he is!" she said to herself, contemptuously. "There is no cleverness in fooling such an imbecile as that. I am going on velvet so far; I only hope my lady may be as easily dealt with as my lady's only son."

My lady's only son went straight to a door down the corridor, quite at the other extremity, and opened it.

It was a lady's dressing-room evidently. Laid out, all ready for wear, was a lady's morning toilet complete, and without more ado Sir Everard confiscated the whole concern. At the white cashmere robe alone he caviled.

"This is too gay; I must find a more sober garment. All the maid-servants in the house would recognize this immediately."

He went to one of the closets, searched there, and presently reappeared with a black silk dress. Rolling all up in a heap, he started at once with his prize, laughing inwardly at the figure he cut.

"If Lady Louise saw me now, or my lady mother, either, for that matter! What will Mildred and her maid say, I wonder, when they find burglars have been at work, and her matutinal toilet stolen?"

He bore the bundle straight to the chamber of his pretty runaway, and tapped at the door. It was discreetly opened an inch or two.

"Here are some clothes. When you are dressed, come out. I will wait in the passage."

"Thank you," Miss Silver's soft voice said.

The young person whose adventures were so highly sensational doffed her velveteens and donned the dainty garments of Miss Mildred Kingsland.

All the things were beautifully made and embroidered, marked with the initials "M. K.," and adorned with the Kingsland crest.

"Miss Mildred Kingsland must be tall and slender, since her dress fits me so well. Ah, what a change even a black silk dress makes in one's appearance! He admired me---I saw he did, in jacket and pantaloons---what will be do, then, in this? Will he fall in love with me, I wonder?"

One parting peep in the glass, and she opened the door and stepped out before Sir Everard Kingsland, a dazzling vision of beauty.

He stood and gazed. Could he believe his eyes? Was this superb-looking woman with the flowing curls, the dark, bright beauty and imperial mien, the lad in velveteen who had shot the poacher last night? Why, Cleopatra might have looked like that, in the height of her regal splendor, or Queen Semiramis, in the glorious days that were gone.

"This is indeed a transformation," he said, coming forward. "Your disguise was perfect. I should never have known you for the youth I parted from ten minutes ago."

"I can never thank you sufficiently, Sir Everard. Ah, if you knew how I abhorred myself in that hateful disguise! Nothing earthly will ever induce me to put it on again."

"I trust not," he said, gravely; "let us hope it may never be necessary. You are safe here, Miss Silver, from the tyranny of your uncle and cousin. The friendless and unprotected shall never be turned from Kingsland Court."

She took his hand and lifted it to her lips, and once more the luminous eyes were swimming in tears.

"I would thank you if I could, Sir Everard," the sweet voice murmured: "but you overpower me! Your goodness is beyond thanks."

A footstep on the marble stair made itself unpleasantly audible at this interesting crisis. Miss Silver dropped the baronet's hand with a wild instinct of flight in her great black eyes.

"Return to your room," Sir Everard whispered. "Lock the door, and remain there until I apprise my mother of your presence here and prepare her to receive you. Quick! I don't want these prying prigs of servants to find you here."

She vanished like a flash.

Sir Everard walked down-stairs, and passed his own valet sleepily ascending.

"I beg your parding, Sir Heverard," said the valet; "but we was all very anxious about you. Sir Galahad came galloping home riderless, and---"

"That will do, Edward. You did not disturb Lady Kingsland?"

"No, Sir Heverard."

Sir Everard passed abruptly on and sought the stables at once. Sir Galahad was there, undergoing his morning toilet, and greeted his master with a loud neigh of delight.

The young baronet dawdled away the lagging morning hours, smoking endless cigars under the waving trees, and waiting for the time when my lady should be visible. She rarely rose before noon, but to-day she deigned to get up at nine. Sir Everard flung away his last cigar, and went bounding up the grand stairs three at a time.

Lady Kingsland sat breakfasting in her boudoir with her daughter---a charming little bijou of a room, all filigree work, and fluted walls, delicious little Greuze paintings, and flowers and perfume---and Lady Kingsland, in an exquisitely becoming robe de matin, at five-and-fifty looked fair and handsome, and scarce middle-aged yet. Time, that deals so gallantly with these blonde beauties, had just thinned the fair hair at the parting, and planted dainty crow's-feet about the patrician mouth, but left no thread of silver under the pretty Parisian lace cap.

Mildred Kingsland, opposite her mother, scarcely bore her thirty years so gracefully. She had had her little romance, and it had been incontinently nipped in the bud by imperious mamma, and she had dutifully yielded, with the pain sharp in her heart all the same. But he was poor, and Mildred was weak, and so Lady Kingsland's only daughter glided uncomplainingly into old-maidhood.

My lady glanced over her shoulder, and greeted her son with a bright, loving smile. He was her darling and her pride---her earthly idol---the last of the Kingslands.

"Good-morning, Everard! I thought you would have done Mildred and myself the honor of breakfasting with us. Perhaps it is not too late yet. May I offer you a cup of chocolate?"

"Not at all too late, mother mine. I accept your offer and your chocolate on the spot. Milly, good-morning! You are white as your dress! What is the matter?"

"Mildred is fading away to a shadow of late," his mother said. "I must take her to the sea-shore for change."

"When?" asked Sir Everard.

"Let me see. Ah! when you are married, I think. What time did you come home last night, and how is Lady Louise?"

"Lady Louise is very well. My good mother"---half laughing---"are you very anxious for a daughter-in-law at Kingsland to quarrel with?"

"I shall not quarrel with Lady Louise."

"Then, willy-nilly, it must be Lord Carteret's daughter, and no other?"

"Everard," his mother said, earnestly, "you know I have set my heart on seeing Lady Louise your wife; and she loves you, I know. And you, my darling Everard---you will not disappoint me?"

"I should be an ungrateful wretch if I did! Rest easy, *ma mere*---Lady Louise shall become Lady Kingsland, or the fault shall not be mine. I believed I should have asked the momentous little question last night but for that interloper, George Grosvenor!"

"Ah! jealous, of course. He is always *de trop*, that great, stupid George," my lady said. "And was the dinner-party agreeable; and what time did you get home?"

"The dinner-party was delightful, and I came home shortly after midnight. What time Sir Galahad arrived I can't say---half an hour before I did, at least."

Lady Kingsland looked inquiringly.

"Did you not ride Sir Galahad?"

"Yes, until I was torn from the saddle! My dear mother, I met with an adventure last night, and you had like never to see your precious son again."

"Everard!"

"Quite true. But for the direct interposition of Providence, in the shape of a handsome lad in velveteen, who shot my assailant, I would be lying now in Brithlow Wood yonder, as dead as any Kingsland in the family vault."

And then, while Lady Kingsland gazed at him breathlessly, Sir Everard related his midnight adventure.

"Good heavens!" my lady cried, clasping him in her arms. "Oh, to think what might have happened! My boy---my boy!"

"Very true, mother; but a miss is as good as a mile, you know. Poetical justice befell my assailant; and here I am safe and sound, sipping chocolate."

"And the preserver of your life, Everard---where is he?"

"Upstairs, waiting like patience on a monument; and by the same token, fasting all this time! But it isn't a he, *ma mere*; it's a she."

"What?"

Sir Everard laughed.

"Such a mystified face, mother! Oh; it's highly sensational and melodramatic, I promise you! Sit down and hear the sequel."

And then, eloquently and persuasively, Sir Everard repeated Miss Sybilla Silver's extraordinary story, and Lady Kingsland was properly shocked.

"Disguised herself in men's clothes! My dear Everard, what a dreadful creature she must be!"

"Not at all dreadful, mother. She is as sensitive and womanly a young lady as ever I saw in my life. And, she's a very pretty girl, too."

Lady Kingsland looked suspiciously at her son. She highly disapproved of pretty girls where he was concerned; but the handsome face was frank and open as the day.

"Now don't be suspicious, Lady Kingsland. I'm not going to fall in love with Miss Sybilla Silver, I give you my word and honor. She saved my life, remember. May I not fetch her here?"

"What! in men's clothes, and before your sister? Everard, how dare you?"

Sir Everard broke into a peal of boyish laughter that made the room ring.

"I don't believe she's in men's clothes!" exclaimed Mildred, suddenly. "Honorine told me robbers must have been in my dressing-room last night---half my things were stolen. I understand it now---Everard was the robber."

"I am going for her, mother. Remember she is friendless, and that she saved your son's life."

He quitted the room with the last word. That claim, he knew, was one his mother would never repudiate.

"Oh!" she said, lying back in her chair pale and faint, "to think what might have happened!"

As she spoke her son re-entered the room, and by his side a young lady---so stately, so majestic in her dark beauty, that involuntarily the mother and daughter arose.

"My mother, this young lady saved my life. Try and thank her for me. Lady Kingsland, Miss Silver."

Surely some subtle power of fascination invested this dark daughter of the earth. The liquid dark eyes lifted themselves in mute appeal to the great lady's face, and then the proudest woman in England opened her arms with a sudden impulse and took the outcast to her bosom.

"I can never thank you," she murmured. "The service you have rendered me is beyond all words."

An hour later Sybilla went slowly back to her room. She had breakfasted *tete-a-tete* with my lady and her daughter, while Sir Everard, in scarlet coat and cord and tops, had mounted his bonny bay and ridden off to Lady Louise and the fox-hunt, and to his fate, though he knew it not.

"Really, Mildred," my lady said, "a most delightful young person, truly. Do you know, if she does not succeed in finding her friends I should like to retain her as a companion?"

In her own room Sybilla Silver stood before the glass, and she smiled back at her own image.

"So, my lady," she said, "you walk into the trap with your eyes open, too---you who are old enough to know better? My handsome face and black eyes and smooth tongue stand me in their usual good stead. And I saved Sir Everard Kingsland's life! Poor fools! A thousand times better for you all if I had let that midnight assassin shoot him down like a dog!"

CHAPTER X.

A SHAFT FROM CUPID'S QUIVER.

It was fully ten o'clock, and the hunting-party were ready to start, when Sir Everard Kingsland joined them, looking handsome and happy as a young prince in his very becoming hunting costume.

Of course the young baronet's first look was for Lady Louise--he scarcely glanced at the rest. She was just being assisted into the saddle by the devoted George Grosvenor, but she turned to Sir Everard and graciously held out her gauntleted hand.

"Once more," she said, "almost late. Laggard! I shall quarrel with you one of these days if you do not learn to be more punctual."

"You will never have to reproach me again," he said. "Had I known you would have honored my absence by a thought, you should not have had to reproach me now."

"Very pretty, indeed, Sir Everard. But don't waste your time paying compliments this morning. Thanks, Mr. Grosvenor; that will do. For whom are you looking, Sir Everard? Lady Carteret? Oh, she is going to see as much of the fun as she can from the carriage, with some other ladies. Miss Hunsden and myself are the only ones who intend to ride. By the way, I hope Sir Galahad will uphold his master's reputation to-day. He must do his very best, or Whirlwind will beat him."

At that instant a red-coated young gentleman joined them, in an evident state of excitement.

"I say, Kingsland, who's that girl on the splendid roan? She sits superbly, and is stunningly handsome besides. I beg your pardon, Lady Louise---perhaps you know."

"Lord Ernest Strathmore is excited on the subject. That young lady is Miss Harriet Hunsden. Don't lose your head, my lord. One gentleman possesses that heart, and all the rest of you may sigh in vain."

"Indeed! And who is the fortunate possessor?"

"Captain Hunsden, her father."

At the first mention of her name Sir Everard Kingsland had turned sharply around and beheld---his fate. But he did not know it. He only saw a handsome, spirited-looking girl, sitting a magnificent roan horse as easily as if it had been an arm-chair, and talking animatedly to a stalwart soldierly man with white hair and mustache.

As he glanced away from his prolonged stare he met the piercing gaze of Lady Louise's turquoise-blue eyes.

"*Et tu, Brute?*" she cried gayly. "Oh, my prophetic soul! Did I not warn you, Sir Everard? Did I not foretell that the dashing damsel in the scarlet habit would play the mischief with your fox-hunting hearts? No, no! never deny the soft impeachment! But I tell you, as I told Lord Ernest, it is of no use. She is but seventeen, and 'ower young to marry yet."

Before Sir Everard could retort, the cry of "Here they come!" proclaimed the arrival of the hounds.

The hounds were put into the gorse, and the red-coats began to move out of the field into the lane, Sir Everard and Lady Louise with them.

A loud "Halloo!" rang through the air; the hounds came with a rushing roar over a fence.

"There he is!" cried a chorus of voices, as the fox flew over the ground.

And at the same instant Whirlwind tore by like its namesake, with the handsome girl upright as a dart. Away went Sir Galahad, side by side with the roan. Lady Louise and her sedate nag were left hopelessly behind.

On and on like the wind Whirlwind flew the fences, and Miss Hunsden sat in her saddle like a queen on her throne.

The young baronet, even in the fierce heat of the hunt, could see the beautiful glowing face, the flashing gray eyes, and the lances of light flickering in the gold-brown hair. Side by side Sir Galahad and Whirlwind darted to the end of the fourth inclosure.

Then came a change---a wall of black, heavy thorn rose ahead, which no one was mad enough to face.

The baronet pulled his bay violently to the right and looked to see the dashing huntress follow. But, no; the blood of Miss Hunsden and the "red-roan steed" was up, and straight they went at that awful pace.

"For God's sake, Miss Hunsden!" cried the voice of Lord Ernest Strathmore, "don't try that!"

But he might as well have spoken to the cataract of Niagara. With a tremendous rush Whirlwind charged the place. There was a horrible crash---another---and a plunge downward.

Sir Everard turned sick with horror; but Whirlwind settled into his stride, and the girl recovered her balance in the very instant, and away again like the wind.

"Splendidly done, by Jove!" cried Lord Ernest. "I never saw a lady ride before like that in all my life."

Sir Everard dashed on. His horse was on his mettle; but, do what he would, the slender, girlish figure, and superb roan kept ahead. Whirlwind took hedges and ditches before him, disdainingly to the right or left, and after a sharp run of an hour, Miss Hunsden had the glory and happiness of being one of the few up at the finish in time to see the fox, quite dead, held over the huntsman's head, with the hounds hanging expectant around.

Every eye turned upon the heroine of the hour, and loud were the canticles chanted in her honor. The master of the hounds himself rode up, all aglow with admiration.

"Miss Hunsden," he said, "I never in all my life saw a lady ride as you rode to-day. There are not half a dozen men in Devonshire who would have faced those fences as you did. I sincerely hope you will frequently honor our field by your presence and matchless riding."

Miss Hunsden bowed easily and smiled.

And then her father came up, his soldierly old face aglow.

"Harrie, my dear, I am proud of you! You led us all to-day. I wouldn't have taken that nasty place myself, and I didn't believe even Whirlwind could do it."

Then George Grosvenor and Lord Ernest and the rest of the men crowded around, and compliments poured in in a deluge.

Sir Everard held himself aloof---disgusted, nauseated---or so he told himself.

"Such an unwomanly exhibition! Such a daring, masculine leap! And see how she sits and smiles on those empty-headed fox-hunters, like an Amazonian queen in her court! How different from Lady Louise! And yet! good heavens! how royally beautiful she is!"

"Alone, Kingsland?" exclaimed a voice at his elbow; and glancing around he saw Lord Carteret. "What do you think of our pretty Di Vernon? You don't often see a lady ride like that. Why don't you pay your respects? Don't know her, eh? Come along; I'll present you."

Sir Everard's heart gave a sudden plunge, quite unaccountably. Without a word he rode up to where the gray-eyed enchantress held her magic circle.

"Harrie, my dear," said the elderly nobleman, "I bring a worshiper who hovers aloof and gazes in speechless admiration. Let me present my young friend, Sir Everard Kingsland, Miss Hunsden."

Sir Everard took off his hat, and bent to his saddle-bow.

"Sir Everard Kingsland!" cried Captain Hunsden, cordially. "Son of my old friend, Sir Jasper, I'll be sworn! My dear boy, how are you? I knew your father well. We were at Rugby together, and sworn companions. Harrie, this is the son of my oldest friend."

"Papa's friends are all mine!"

The voice was clear and sweet as the beaming eyes. She held out her hand with a frank grace, and Sir Everard took it, its light touch thrilling to the core of his heart.

Sir Everard Kingsland rode back to Carteret Park beside the Indian officer and his daughter as a man might ride in a trance. Surely within an hour the whole world had been changed! He rode on air instead of solid soil, and the sunshine of heaven was not half so brilliant as Harriet Hunsden's smile.

"Confess now, Sir Everard," she said, "you were shocked and scandalized. I saw it in your face. Oh, don't deny it, and don't tell polite fibs! I always shock people, and rather enjoy it than otherwise."

"Harriet!" her father said, reprovingly. "She is a spoiled madcap, Sir Everard, and I am afraid the fault is mine. She has been everywhere with me in her seventeen years of life---freezing amid the snows of Canada and grilling alive under the broiling sun of India. And the result is---what you see."

"The result is---perfection!"

"Papa," Miss Hunsden said, turning her sparkling face to her father, "for Sir Everard's sake, pray change the subject. If you talk of me, he will feel in duty bound to pay compliments; and really, after such a fast run, it is too much to expect of any man. There! I see Lady Louise across the brook yonder. I will leave you gentlemen to cultivate one another. *Allons, messieurs!*"

One fleeting, backward glance of the bewitching face, a saucy smile and a wave of the hand, and Whirlwind had leaped across the brook and ambled on beside the sober charger of Lady Louise.

"Every one has been talking of your riding, Miss Hunsden," Lady Louise said. "I am nearly beside myself with envy. Lord Ernest Strathmore says you are the most graceful equestrienne he ever saw."

"His lordship is very good. I wish I could return the compliment, but his chestnut balked shamefully, and came home dead beat!"

Lord Ernest was within hearing distance of the clear, girlish voice, but he only laughed good-naturedly.

"As you are strong, be merciful, Miss Hunsden. We can't all perform miracles on horseback, you know. I came an awful cropper at that ugly hedge, to be sure, and your red horse went over me like a blaze of lightning! You owe me some atonement, and---of course you are going to the ball to-night?"

"Of course! I like balls even better than hunting."

"And she dances better than she rides," put in her father, coming up.

"She is perfection in everything she undertakes, I am certain," Lord Ernest said, "and for that atonement I speak of, Miss Hunsden, I claim the first waltz."

They rode together to Carteret Park. Sir Everard had the privilege of assisting her to dismount.

"You must be fatigued, Miss Hunsden," he said. "With a ball in prospective, after your hard gallop, I should recommend a long rest."

"Sir Everard, I don't know the meaning of that word 'fatigue.' I never was tired in my life, and I am ready for the ball to-night, and a steeple-chase to-morrow."

She tripped off as she spoke, with a mischievous glance. She wanted to shock him, and she succeeded.

"Poor girl!" he thought, as he slowly turned homeward, "she is really dreadful. She never had a mother, I suppose, and wandering over the world with her father has made her a perfect savage. She is truly to be pitied---so exceedingly beautiful as she is, too!"

Sir Everard certainly was very sorry for that hoidenish Miss Hunsden. He thought of her while dressing for dinner, and he talked of her all through that meal "more in sorrow than in anger."

Sybilla Silver, quite like one of the family already, listened with greedy ears and eager black eyes.

"You ought to call, mother," the baronet said, "you and Mildred. Common politeness requires it, Captain Hunsden was my father's most intimate friend, and this wild girl stands sadly in need of some matronly adviser."

"I remember Captain Hunsden," Lady Kingsland said, thoughtfully, "and I remember this girl, too, when she was a child of three or four years. He was a very handsome man, I recollect, and he married away in Canada or the United States. There was some mystery about that marriage---something vague and unpleasant---no one knew what. She ought to be pretty, this daughter."

"Pretty!" Sir Everard exclaimed; "she is beautiful as an angel! I never saw such eyes or such a smile in the whole course of my life."

"Indeed!" his mother said, coldly---"indeed! Not even excepting Lady Louise's?"

"Oh, Lady Louise is altogether different! I didn't mean any comparison. But you will see her to-night at Lady Carteret's ball, and can judge for yourself. She is a mere child--sixteen or seventeen, I believe."

"And Lady Louise is five-and-twenty," said Mildred, with awful accuracy.

"She does not look twenty!" exclaimed my lady, sharply. "There are few young ladies nowadays half so elegant and graceful as Lady Louise."

Miss Silver's large black eyes glided from one to the other with a sinister smile in their shining depths. Her soft voice broke in at this jarring juncture and sweetly turned the disturbed current of conversation, and Sir Everard understood, and gave her a grateful glance.

The young baronet had gone to many balls in his lifetime, but never had he been so painfully particular before. He drove Edward, his valet, to the verge of madness with his whims, and left off at last in sheer desperation and altogether dissatisfied with the result.

"I look like a guy, I know," he muttered, angrily, "and that pert little Hunsden is just the sort of girl to make satirical comments on a man if his neck-tie is awry or his hair unbecoming. Not that I care what she says; but one hates to feel he is a laughing-stock."

The ball-room was brilliant with lights, and music, and flowers, and diamonds, and beautiful faces, and magnificent toilets when the Kingsland party entered.

Lady Carteret, in velvet robes, stood receiving her guests. Lady Louise, with white azaleas in her hair and dress, stood stately and graceful, looking from tip to toe what she was the descendant of a race of "highly-wed, highly-fed, highly-bred" aristocrats.

But at neither of them Sir Everard glanced twice. His eyes wandered around and lighted at last on a divinity in a cloud of misty white, crowned with dark-green ivy leaves aglitter with diamond drops.

While he gazed, Lord Ernest Strathmore came up, said something, and whirled her off in the waltz. Away they flew. Lord Ernest waltzed to perfection, and she--a French woman or a fairy only could float like that.

A fierce, jealous pang griped his heart; a second, and they were out of sight. Sir Everard roused himself from his trance and went up to his hostess to pay his respects.

"Ah!" Lady Carteret said, a little spitefully, "the spell is broken at last! There was no mistaking that look, Sir Everard! My dear Lady Kingsland"---laughing, but malicious still---"take care of your son. I'm afraid he's going to fall in love."

CHAPTER XI.

"FOR LOVE WILL STILL BE LORD OF ALL."

My Lady Carteret's ball was a brilliant success, and, fairest where all were fair, Harrie Hunsden shone down all competitors. As she floated down the long ball-room on the arm of Lord Ernest, light as a swimming-sprite, a hundred admiring male eyes followed, and a hundred fair patrician bosoms throbbed with bitterest envy.

"The little Hunsden is in full feather to-night," lisped George Grosvenor, coming up with his adored Lady Louise on his arm. "There is nothing half so beautiful in the room, with one exception. And only look at Kingsland! Oh, he's done for, to a dead certainty!"

Sir Everard started up rather confusedly. He had been leaning against a pillar, gazing after the divinity in the ivy crown, with his heart in his eyes, and Lady Louise was the last person in the universe he had been thinking of.

"We are losing our waltz, Mr. Grosvenor," she said, frigidly, "and we are disturbing Sir Everard Kingsland. The 'Guards' Waltz' is a great deal too delightful to be missed."

"I fancied the first waltz was to be mine, Lady Louise," Sir Everard said, with an awful sense of guilt.

Lady Louise's blue eyes flashed fire.

"With Miss Hunsden, perhaps---certainly not with me. Come, Mr. Grosvenor."

It was the first spiteful shaft Lady Louise had ever condescended to launch, and she bit her lip angrily an instant after, as George whirled her away.

"Idiot that I am," she thought, "to show him I can stoop to be piqued---to show him I can be jealous---to show him I care for him like this! He will get to fancy I love him next, and he---he has had neither eyes nor ears for any one else since he saw Harrie Hunsden this morning."

A sharp, quick pain pierced the proud breast of the earl's daughter, for she did love him, and she knew it---as much as it was in her lymphatic nature to love at all.

"I will never forgive him---never!" her white teeth clinched. "The dastard---to play the devoted to me, and then desert me at the first sight of a madcap on horseback. I will never stoop to say one civil word to him again."

Lady Louise kept her vow. Sir Everard, penitent and remorseful, strove to make his peace in vain.

Lord Carteret's daughter listened icily, sent barbed shafts tipped with poison from her tongue in reply, danced with him once, and steadily refused to dance again.

Sir Everard gave it up and went in search of Miss Hunsden, and was accepted by that young lady for a redowa.

"I thought you would have asked me ages ago," said Harrie, with delicious frankness. "I saw you were a good dancer, and that is more than I can say for any other gentleman present, except Lord Ernest. Ah, Lord Ernest can waltz! It is the height of ball-room bliss to be his partner. But you stayed away to quarrel with Lady Louise, I suppose?"

"I have not been quarreling with Lady Louise," replied, Sir Everard, feeling guiltily conscious all the same.

"No? It looked like it, then. She snubs you in the most merciless manner, and you---oh, what a penitent face you wore the last time you approached her! I thought she was a great deal too uplifted for flirting, but what do you call that with George Grosvenor?"

"George Grosvenor is a very old friend. Here is our redowa, Miss Hunsden. Never mind Lady Louise."

His arm encircled her waist, and away they flew. Sir Everard could dance as well as Lord Ernest, and quite as many admiring eyes followed him and the bright little belle of the ball. Mr. Grosvenor pulled his tawny mustache with inward delight.

"Handsome couple, eh, Carteret?" he said to his host; "it is an evident case of spoons there. Well, the boy is only two-and-twenty, and at that age we all lost our heads easily."

Two angry red spots, quite foreign to her usual complexion, burned on Lady Louise's fair cheeks. She turned abruptly away and left the gentlemen.

"Little Harrie is pretty enough to excuse an older man losing his head," Lord Carteret answered; "but it would not suit Lady Kingsland's book at all. The Hunsden is poorer than a church-mouse, and though of one of our best old-country families, the pedigree bears no proportion to my lady's pride. A duke's daughter, in her estimation, would be none too good for her darling son."

Mr. Grosvenor smiled satirically.

"She is a wonderful woman---my lady---but I fancy she is matched at last. If Kingsland sets his heart on this latest fancy, all the powers of earth and Hades will not move him. Do you recollect that little affair of Miss Kingsland and poor Douglas of the ---th? My lady put a stop to that, and he was shot, poor fellow, before Balaklava. But the son and heir is quite another story. Apropos, I must ask little Mildred to dance. *Adio*, Carteret!"

The ball whirled on---the hours went by like bright, swift flashes, and, from the moment of the redowa, to Sir Everard Kingsland it was one brief, intoxicating dream of delirium. My Lady Kingsland's maternal frowns, my Lady Louise's imperial scorn---all were forgotten. She was a madcap and a hoiden---a wild, hare-brained, fox-hunting Amazon---all that was shocking and unwomanly, but, at the same time, all that was bright, beautiful, entrancing, irresistible. His golden-haired ideal, with the azure eyes and seraphic smile was forgotten, and this gray-eyed enchantress, robed in white, crowned with ivy, dancing desperately the whole night long, set brain and heart reeling in the mad tarantella of love.

It was over at last. The gray and dismal dawn of the November morning stole chilly through the curtained casements. A half-blown rose from Miss Hunsden's bouquet bloomed in Sir Everard's button-hole, and it was Sir Everard's blissful privilege to fold Miss Hunsden's furred mantle around those pearly shoulders.

The bleak morning breeze blew her perfumed hair across his eyes, as she leaned on his arm and he handed her into the carriage.

"We shall expect to see you at Hunsden Hall," the Indian officer said, heartily. "Your father's son, Sir Everard, will ever be a most welcome guest."

"Yes," said Harrie, coquettishly; "come and inquire how my health is after dancing all night. Etiquette demands that much, and I'm a great stickler for etiquette."

"Sir Everard would never have discovered it, I am certain, my dear, if you had not told him."

"A thousand thanks! I shall only be too delighted to avail myself of both invitations."

Sir Everard went home to Kingsland Court as he never had gone home before. The whole world was *couleur de rose*---the bleak November morning and the desolate high-road---sweeter, brighter than the Elysian Fields.

How beautiful she was! how the starry eyes had flashed! how the rosy lips had smiled! Half the men at the ball were in love with her, he knew; and she---she had danced twice with him, all night, for once with any one else.

It was a very silent drive. Lady Kingsland sat back among her wraps in displeased silence; Mildred never talked much, and the young baronet was lost in blissful ecstasy a great deal too deep for words. He could not even see his mother was angry---he never gave one poor thought to Lady Louise. The whole world was bounded by Harriet Hunsden.

Sybilla Silver was up and waiting. A bright fire, a cheery cup of tea, and a smiling face greeted her ladyship.

"Really, Miss Silver," she said, languidly, "this is very thoughtful of you. Where is my maid?"

"Asleep, my lady. Pray let me fulfill her duties this once. I hope you enjoyed the ball?"

"I never enjoyed a ball less in my life. Pray make haste---I am in no mood for talking."

Sybilla's swift, deft fingers disrobed the moody lady, loosened the elaborate structure of hair, brushed it out, and all the while she sat frowning angrily at the fire.

"There was a young lady at the hall---a Miss Hunsden," she said, at last, breaking out in spite of herself---"and the exhibition she made was perfectly disgraceful. Miss Silver, if you see my son before I get up to-day, tell him I wish particularly for his company at breakfast."

"Yes, my lady," Miss Silver said, docilely; and my lady did not see the smile that faded with the words.

She understood it perfectly. Sir Everard had broken from the maternal apron-string, deserted the standard of Lady Louise, and gone over to "bold, odious" Miss Hunsden.

Sybilla dutifully delivered the message the first time she met the baronet. A groom was holding Sir Galahad, and his master was just vaulting into the saddle. He turned away from the dark face and sweet voice.

"It is impossible this morning," he said. "Tell Lady Kingsland I shall meet her at dinner."

He rode away as he spoke, with the sudden consciousness that it was the first time he and that devoted mother had ever clashed. Thinking of her, he thought of her favorite.

"She wants to read me a tirade, I suppose, about her pet, Lady Louise," he said to himself. "They would badger me into marrying her if they could. I never cared two straws for the daughter of Earl Carteret; she is frightfully *passee*, and she's three years older than I am. I am glad I did not commit myself to please my mother."

Sir Everard reached Hunsden Hall in time for luncheon. The old place looked deserted and ruined. The half-pay Indian officer's poverty was visible everywhere---in the time-worn furniture, the neglected grounds, the empty stables, and the meager staff of old-time servants.

"Captain Hunsden is so poor that he will be glad to marry his daughter to the first rich man who asks her. The Hunsden estate is strictly entailed to the next male heir; he has only his pay, and she will be left literally a beggar at his death."

His eyes flashed triumphantly at the thought. Harrie Hunsden stood in the sunshine on the lawn, with half a score of dogs, big and little, bouncing around her, more lovely, it seemed to the infatuated young baronet, in her simple

home-dress, than ever. No trace of yesterday's fatiguing hunt, or last night's fatiguing dancing, was visible in that radiant face.

But just at that instant Captain Hunsden advanced to meet him, with Lord Ernest Strathmore by his side.

"What brings that idiot here?" Sir Everard thought. "How absurdly early he must have ridden over!"

He turned to Miss Hunsden and uttered the polite common-place proper for the occasion.

"I told you I never was fatigued," the young lady said, playing with her dogs, and sublimely at her ease. "I am ready for a second hunt to-day, and a ball to-night, and a picnic the day after. I should have been a boy. It's perfectly absurd, my being a ridiculous girl, when I feel as if I could lead a forlorn hope, or, like Alexander, conquer a world. Come to luncheon."

"Conquer a world---come to luncheon? A pretty brace of subjects!" said her father.

"Miss Hunsden is quite capable of conquering a world without having been born anything so horrid as a boy," said Lord Ernest. "There are bloodless conquests, wherein the conquerors of the world are conquered themselves."

The baronet scowled. Miss Hunsden retorted saucily. She and Lord Ernest kept up a brilliant wordy war.

He sat like a silent fool---like an imbecile, he said to himself, glowering malignantly. He was madly in love, and he was furiously jealous. What business had this ginger-whiskered young lordling interloping here? And how disgustingly self-assured and at home he was! He tried to talk to the captain, but it was a miserable failure.

It was a relief when a servant entered with the mailbag.

"The mail reaches us late," Captain Hunsden said, as he opened it. "I like my letters with my breakfast."

"Any for me, papa?" Harriet asked.

"One---from your governess in Paris, I think---and half a dozen for me."

He glanced carelessly at the superscriptions as he laid them down. But as he took the last he uttered a low cry; his face turned livid: he stared at it as if it had turned into a death's-head in his hand.

"Oh, papa---"

She stopped in a sort of breathless affright.

Captain Hunsden rose up. He made no apology. He walked to a window and tore open his letter with passionate haste.

His daughter still stood---pale, breathless.

Suddenly, with a hoarse, dreadful cry, he flung the letter from him, staggered blindly, and fell down in a fit.

A girl's shrill scream pierced the air. She sprung forward, thrust the letter into her bosom, knelt beside her father, and lifted his head. His face was dark purple, the blood oozed in trickling streams from his mouth and nostrils.

All was confusion. They bore him to his room; a servant was dispatched in mad haste for a doctor. Harriet bent over him, white as death. The two young men waited, pale, alarmed, confounded.

It was an hour before the doctor came---another before he left the sick man's room. As he departed, Harriet Hunsden glided into the apartment where the young men waited, white as a spirit.

"He is out of danger; he is asleep. Pray leave us now. To-morrow he will be himself again."

It was quite evident that she was used to these attacks. The young men bowed respectfully and departed.

Sir Everard was in little humor, as he went slowly and moodily homeward, for his mother's lecture.

"There is some secret in Captain Hunsden's life," he thought, "and his daughter shares it. Some secret, perhaps, of shame and disgrace---some bar sinister in their shield; and, good heavens! I am mad enough to love her---I, a Kingsland, of Kingsland, whose name and escutcheon are without a blot! What do I know of her antecedents or his? My mother spoke of some mystery in his past life; and there is a look of settled gloom in his face that nothing seems able to remove. Lord Ernest Strathmore, too---he must come to complicate matters. She is the most glorious creature the sun shines on; and if I don't ask her to be my wife, she will be my Lady Strathmore before the moon wanes!"

CHAPTER XII.

MISS HUNSDEN SAYS "NO."

Sir Everard found his mother primed and loaded; but she nursed her wrath throughout dinner, and it was not until they were in the drawing-room alone that she went off. He was so moodily *distract* all through the meal that he never saw the volcano smoldering, and the Vesuvian eruption took him altogether by surprise.

"Your conduct has been disgraceful!" Lady Kingsland passionately cried---"unworthy of a man of honor! You pay Lady Louise every attention; you make love to her in the most *prononce* manner, and at the eleventh hour you desert her for this forward little barbarian."

Sir Everard opened his eyes in cool surprise.

"My dear mother, you mistake," he said, with perfect *sang froid*. "Lady Louise made love to me!"

"Everard!"

Her voice absolutely choked with rage.

"It sounds conceited and foppish, I know," pursued the young gentleman; "but you force me to it in self-defense. I never made love to Lady Louise, as Lady Louise can tell you, if you choose to ask."

"You never asked her in so many words, perhaps, to be your wife. Short of that, you have left nothing undone."

Sir Everard thought of the dinner-party, of the moonlit balcony, of George Grosvenor, and was guiltily silent.

"Providence must have sent him," he thought, "to save me in the last supreme moment. Pledged to Lady Louise, and madly in love with Harriet Hunsden, I should blow out my brains before sunset!"

"You are silent," pursued his mother. "Your guilty conscience will not let you answer. You told me yourself, only two days ago, that but for George Grosvenor you would have asked her to be your wife."

"Quite true," responded her son: "but who knows what a day may bring forth? Two days ago I was willing to marry Lady Louise---to ask her, at least. Now, not all the wealth of the Indies, not the crown of the world could tempt me."

"Good heavens!" cried my lady, goaded to the end of her patience; "only hear him! Do you mean to tell me, you absurd, mad-headed boy, that in one day you have fallen hopelessly in love with this hare-brained, masculine Harriet Hunsden?"

"I tell you nothing of the sort, madame; the inference is your own. But this I will say---I would rather marry Harriet Hunsden than any other woman under heaven! Let Lady Louise take George Grosvenor. He is in love with her, which I never was; and he has an earl's coronet in prospective, which I have not. As for me, I have done with this subject at once and forever. Even to you, my mother, I can not delegate my choice of a wife."

"I will never receive Harriet Hunsden!" Lady Kingsland passionately cried.

"Perhaps you will never have the opportunity. She may prefer to become mistress of Strathmore Castle. Lord Ernest is her most devoted adorer. I have not asked her yet. The chances are a thousand to one she will refuse when I do."

His mother laughed scornfully, but her eyes were ablaze.

"You mean to ask her, then?"

"Most assuredly."

She laughed again---a bitter, mirthless laugh.

"We go fast, my friend! And you have hardly known this divinity four-and-twenty hours."

"Love is not a plant of slow growth. Like Jonah's gourd, it springs up, fully matured, in an hour."

"Does it? My son is better versed in amatory floriculture than I am. But before you ask Miss Hunsden to become Lady Kingsland, had you not better inquire who her mother was?"

The baronet thought of the letter, and turned very pale.

"Her mother? I do not understand. What of her mother?"

"Only this"---Lady Kingsland arose as she spoke, her face deathly white, her pale eyes glittering---"the mother is a myth and a mystery. Report says Captain Hunsden was married in America---no one knows where---and America is a wide place. No one ever saw the wife; no one ever heard Miss Hunsden speak of her mother; no one ever heard of that mother's death. I leave Sir Everard Kingsland to draw his own inferences."

She swept from the room with a mighty rustle of silk. A dark figure crouching on the rug, with its ear to the keyhole, barely had time to whisk behind a tall Indian cabinet as the door opened.

It was Miss Sybilla Silver, who was already asserting her prerogative as amateur lady's-maid.

My lady shut herself up in her own room for the remainder of the evening, too angry and mortified for words to tell. It was the first quarrel she and her idolized son ever had, and the disappointment of all her ambitious hopes left her miserable enough.

But scarcely so miserable as Sir Everard. To be hopelessly in love on such short notice was bad enough; to have the dread of a rejection hanging over him was worse; but to have this dark mystery looming horribly in the horizon was worst of all.

His mother's insinuations alone would not have disturbed him; but those insinuations, taken in unison with Captain Hunsden's mysterious illness of the morning, drove him nearly wild.

"And I dare not even ask," he thought, "or set my doubts at rest. Any inquiry from me, before proposing, would be impertinent; and after proposing they would be too late. But one thing I am certain of---if I lose Harrie Hunsden, I shall go mad!"

While he tore up and down like a caged tiger, the door softly opened and his sister looked in.

"Alone, Everard?" she said, timidly, "I thought mamma was with you."

"Mamma has just gone to her room in a blessed temper," answered her brother, savagely. "Come in Milly, and help me in this horrible scrape, if you can."

"Is it something about---Miss Hunsden?" hesitatingly. "I thought mamma looked displeased at dinner."

"Displeased!" exclaimed the young man, with a short laugh; "that is a mild way of putting it. Mamma is inclined to play the Grand Mogul in my case as she did with you and poor Fred Douglas."

"Oh, brother!"

"Forgive me, Milly. I'm a brute and you're an angel, if there ever was one on earth! But I've been hectored and lectured, and badgered and bothered until I'm fairly beside myself. She wants me to marry Lady Louise, and I won't marry Lady Louise if she was the last woman alive. Milly, who was Miss Hunsden's mother?"

"Her mother? I'm sure I don't know. I was quite a little girl when Captain Hunsden was here before, and Harrie was a pretty little curly-haired fairy of three years. I remember her so well. Captain Hunsden dined here once or twice, and I recollect perfectly how gloomy and morose his manner was. I was quite frightened at him. You were at Eton then, you know."

"I know!" impatiently. "I wish to Heaven I had not been. Boy as I was, I should have learned something. Did you never hear the cause of the captain's gloom?"

"No; papa and mamma knew nothing, and Captain Hunsden kept his own secrets. They had heard of his marriage some four or five years before---a low marriage, it was rumored---an actress, or something equally objectionable. Little Harrie knew nothing---at three years it was hardly likely; but she never prattled of her mother as children of that age usually do. There is some mystery about Captain Hunsden's wife, and---pardon me---if you like Miss Hunsden, you ought to have it cleared up."

Everard laughed---a harsh, strident laugh.

"If I like Miss Hunsden, my dear little non-committal Milly. Am I to go to Hunsden Hall and say to its master, 'Look here, Captain Hunsden, give me proofs of your marriage---tell me all about your mysterious wife. You have a very handsome, high-spirited daughter, but before I commit myself by falling in love with her, I want to make sure there was no tarnish on the late Mrs. Hunsden's wedding-ring.' Captain Harold Hunsden is a proud man. How do you think he will like the style of that?"

Mildred stood silent, looking distressed.

"I wish I had married Lady Louise a month ago, and gone out of the country!" he burst out, vehemently. "I wish I had never seen this girl. She is everything that is objectionable---a half-civilized madcap---shrouded in mystery and poverty---danced over the world in a baggage-wagon. I have quarreled with my mother for the first time on her account. But I love her---I love her with all my heart---and I shall go mad or shoot myself if I don't make her my wife!"

He flung himself impetuously, face downward, on the sofa. Mildred stood pallid and scared in the middle of the floor. Once he lifted his head and looked at her.

"Go away, Milly!" he said, hoarsely. "I'm a savage to frighten you so! Leave me; I shall be better alone."

And Mildred, not knowing what else to do, went.

Next morning, hours before Lady Kingsland was out of bed, Lady Kingsland's son was galloping over the breezy hills and golden downs. An hour's hard run, and he made straight for Hunsden Hall.

Miss Hunsden was taking a constitutional up and down the terrace overlooking the sea, with three big dogs. She turned round at Sir Everard's approach and greeted him quite cordially.

"Papa is so much better this morning," she said, "that he is coming down to breakfast. He is subject to these attacks, and they never last long. Any exciting news overthrows him altogether."

"That letter contained exciting news, then?" Sir Everard could not help saying.

"I presume so---I did not read it. How placid the sea looks this morning, aglitter in the sunlight. And yet I have been in the middle of the Atlantic when the waves ran mountains high."

"You are quite a heroine, Miss Hunsden, and a wonderful traveler for a seventeen-year-old young lady. You see, I know your age; but at seventeen a young lady does not mind, I believe. How long have you been in England this time?"

He spoke with careless adroitness; Miss Hunsden answered, frankly enough:

"Five months. You were abroad, I think, at the time."

"Yes. And now you have come for good, I hope---as if Miss Hunsden could come for anything else."

"It all depends on papa's health," replied Harriet, quietly ignoring the compliment. "I should like to stay, I confess. I am very, very fond of England."

"Of course---as you should be of your native place." He was firing nearer the target.

"England is not my native place," said Harriet, calmly. "I was born at Gibraltar."

"At Gibraltar! You surprise me. Of course your mother was not a native of Gibraltar?"

"Of course not. My mother was an American---born and bred and married in New York."

"I suppose you scarcely remember her?"

"Scarcely," the young lady repeated, dryly; "since I never saw her."

"Indeed! She died then---"

"At my birth---yes. And now, Sir Everard"---the bright, clear eyes flashed suddenly full upon him---"is the catechism almost at an end?"

He absolutely recoiled. If ever guilt was written on a human face, it was readily written on his.

"Ah!" Miss Hunsden said, scornfully, "you thought I couldn't find you out---you thought I couldn't see your drift. Have a better opinion of my powers of penetration next time, Sir Everard. My poor father, impoverished in purse, broken in health, sensitive in spirit, chooses to hide his wounds---chooses not to wear his heart on his sleeve for the Devonshire daws to peck at---chooses never to speak of his lost wife---and, lo! all the gossips of the country are agape for the news. She was an actress, was she not, Sir Everard? And when I ride across the country, at the heels of the hounds, it is only the spangles, and glitter, and theater glare breaking out again. I could despise it in others, but I did think better things of the son of my father's oldest friend! Good-morning, Sir Everard."

She turned proudly away.

"Stay, Harriet---Miss Hunsden! Stop---for pity's sake, stop and hear me! I have been presuming---impertinent. I have deserved your rebuke."

"You have," she said, haughtily.

"But I asked those questions because the nameless insinuations I heard drove me mad---because I love you, I worship you, with all my heart and soul."

Like an impetuous torrent the words burst out. He actually flung himself on his knees before her.

"My beautiful, queenly, glorious Harriet! I love you as man never loved woman before!"

Miss Hunsden stood aghast, staring, absolutely confounded. For one instant she stood thus; then all was forgotten in her sense of the ludicrous. She leaned against a tree, and set up a shout of laughter long and clear.

"Oh, good gracious!" cried Miss Hunsden, as soon as she was able to speak; "who ever heard the like of this? Sir Everard Kingsland, get up. I forgive you everything for this superhuman joke. I haven't had such a laugh for a month. For goodness' sake get up, and don't be a goose!"

The young baronet sprung to his feet, furious with mortification and rage.

"Miss Hunsden---"

"Oh, don't!" cried Harriet, in a second paroxysm. "Don't make me rupture an artery. Love me?---worship me? Why, you ridiculous thing! you haven't known me two days altogether!"

He turned away without speaking a word.

"And then you're engaged to Lady Louise! Every one says so, and I am sure it looks like it."

"I am not engaged to Lady Louise."

He said those words huskily, and he could say no more.

Miss Hunsden tried to look grave, but her mouth twitched. The sense of the ludicrous overcame her sense of decorum, and again she laughed until the tears stood in her eyes.

"Oh, I shall die!" in a faint whisper. "My sides ache. I beg your pardon, Sir Everard; but indeed I can not help it. It is so funny!"

"So I perceive. Good-morning, Miss Hunsden."

"And now you are angry. Why, Sir Everard!" catching for the first time a glimpse of his deathly white face, "I didn't think you felt like this. Oh! I beg your pardon with all my heart for laughing. I believe I should laugh on the scaffold. It's dreadfully vulgar, but it was born with me, I'm afraid. Did I gallop right into your heart's best affections at the fox-hunt? Why, I thought I shocked you dreadfully. I know I tried to. Won't you shake hands, Sir Everard, and part friends?"

"Miss Hunsden will always find me her friend if she ever needs one. Farewell!"

Again he was turning away. He would not touch the proffered palm. He was so deathly white, and his voice shook so, that the hot tears rushed into the impetuous Harrie's eyes.

"I am so sorry," she said, with the simple humility of a little child. "Please forgive me, Sir Everard. I know it was horrid of me to laugh; but you don't really care for me, you know. You only think you do; and I---oh! I'm only a flighty little girl of seventeen, and I don't love anybody in the world but papa, and I never mean to be married---at least, not for ages to come. Do forgive me."

He bowed low, but he would neither answer nor take her hand. He was far too deeply hurt.

Before she could speak again he was gone.

"And he's as mad as a hatter!" said Harrie, ruefully. "Oh, dear, dear! what torments men are, and what a bore falling in love is! And I liked him, too, better than any of them, and thought we were going to be brothers in arms---Damon and---what's his name?---and all that sort of thing! It's of no use my ever hoping for a friend. I shall never have one in this lower world, for just so sure as I get to like a person, that person must go and fall in love with me, and then we quarrel and part. It's hard."

Miss Hunsden sighed deeply, and went into the house. And Sir Everard rode home as if the fiend was after him--like a man gone mad--flung the reins of the foaming horse to the astounded groom, rushed up to his room and locked himself in, and declined his luncheon and his dinner.

When he came down to breakfast next morning, with a white, wild face, and livid rings round his eyes, he electrified the family by his abrupt announcement:

"I start for Constantinople to-morrow. From thence I shall make a tour of the East. I will not return to England for the next three years."

CHAPTER XIII.

LYING IN BRITHLOW WOOD.

A thunderbolt falling at your feet from a cloudless summer sky must be rather astounding in its unexpectedness, but no thunderbolt ever created half the consternation Sir Everard's fierce announcement did.

"Going away!" his mother murmured--"going to Constantinople. My dear Everard, you don't mean it?"

"Don't I?" he said, fiercely. "Don't I look as if I meant it?"

"But what has happened? Oh, Everard, what does all this mean?"

"It means, mother, that I am a mad, desperate and reckless man; that I don't care whether I ever return to England again or not."

Lady Kingsland's own imperious spirit began to rise. Her cheeks flushed and her eyes flashed.

"It means you are a headstrong, selfish, cruel boy! You don't care an iota what pain you inflict on others, if you are thwarted ever so slightly yourself. I have indulged you from your childhood. You have never known one unsatisfied wish it was in my power to gratify, and this is my reward!"

He sat in sullen silence. He felt the reproach keenly in its simple truth; but his heart was too sore, the pain too bitter, to let him yield.

"You promise me obedience in the dearest wish of my heart," her ladyship went on, heedless of the presence of Mildred and Sybilla, "and you break that promise at the first sight of a wild young hoiden in a hunting-field. It is on her account you frighten me to death in this heartless manner, because I refuse my consent to your consummating your own disgrace."

"My disgrace? Take care, mother!"

"Do you dare speak in that tone to me?" She rose up from the table, livid with passion. "I repeat it, Sir Everard Kingsland--your disgrace! Mystery shrouds this girl's birth and her father's marriage--if he ever was married--and where there is mystery there is guilt."

"A sweeping assertion!" the baronet said, with concentrated scorn; "but in the present instance, my good mother, a little out of place. The mystery is of your own making. The late Mrs. Harold Hunsden was a native of New York. There she

was married---there she died at her daughter's birth. Captain Hunsden cherishes her memory all too deeply to make it the town talk, hence all the county is up agape inventing slander. I hope you are satisfied?"

Lady Kingsland stood still, gazing at him in surprise.

"Who told you all this?" she asked.

"She who had the best right to know---the slandered woman's daughter."

"Indeed---indeed!" slowly and searchingly. "You have been talking to her, then? And your whole heart is really set on this matter, Everard?"

She came a step nearer; her voice softened; she laid one slender hand, with infinite tenderness, on his shoulder.

"What does it matter?" he retorted, impatiently. "For Heaven's sake, let me alone, mother!"

"My boy, if you really love this wild girl so much, if your whole heart is set on her, I must withdraw my objections. I can refuse my darling nothing. Woo Harriet Hunsden, wed her, and bring her here. I will try and receive her kindly for your sake."

Sir Everard Kingsland shook off the fair, white, caressing hand, and rose to his feet, with a harsh, strident laugh. "You are very good, my mother, but it is a little too late. Miss Hunsden did me the honor to refuse me yesterday."

"Refuse you?"

"Even so---incredible as it sounds! You see this little barbarian is not so keenly alive to the magnificent honor of an alliance with the house of Kingsland as some others are, and she said No plumply when I asked her to be my wife."

Again that harsh, jarring laugh rang out, and with the last word he strode from the room, closing the door with an emphatic bang.

Lady Kingsland sunk down in the nearest chair, perfectly overcome. Sybilla Silver raised her tea-cup, and hid a malicious smile there.

"Refused him!" my lady murmured, helplessly. "Mildred, did you hear what he said?"

"Yes, mamma," Mildred replied, in distress. "She is a very proud girl---Harriet Hunsden."

"Proud! Good heavens!" my lady sprung to her feet, goaded by the word. "The wretched little pauper! the uneducated, uncivilized, horrible little wretch! What business has she with pride---with nothing under the sun to be proud of? Refuse my son! Oh, she must be mad, or a fool, or both! I will never forgive her as long as I live; nor him, either, for asking her!"

With which my lady flung out of the apartment, in a towering rage, and went up to her room and fell into hysterics and the arms of her maid on the spot.

It was a day of distress at Kingsland Court---gloom and despair reigned. Lady Kingsland, shut up in her own apartments, would not be comforted---and Sir Everard, busied with his preparations, was doggedly determined to carry

out his designs. Sybilla was the only one who enjoyed the situation.

As she stood in the front portico, early in the afternoon, humming an opera tune, a servant wearing the Hunsden livery rode up to her and delivered a twisted note.

"For Sir Everard," said the man, and rode away.

Miss Silver took it, looked at it with one of her curious little smiles, thought a moment, turned, and carried it straight to my lady. My lady examined it with angry eyes.

"From Miss Hunsden," she said, contemptuously. "She repents her hasty decision, no doubt, and sends to tell him so. Bold, designing creature! Find Sir Everard's valet, Miss Silver, and give it to him."

Sir Everard was in his dressing-room, and his pale face flushed deep red as he received the note. He tore it open and literally devoured the contents.

DEAR SIR EVERARD,---Please, please, please forgive me! Oh, I am so sorry I laughed and made you angry! But indeed I thought you only meant it as a joke. Two days is such a little while to be acquainted before proposing, you know. Won't you come to see us again? Papa has asked for you several times. Pray pardon me. You would if you knew how penitent I am.

Yours remorsefully,
HARRIE HUNSDEN.

Hunsden Hall, Nov. 15th, 18--.

He read the piteous, childish little letter over and over again until his face glowed. Hope planted her shining foot once more on the baronet's heart.

"I will go at once," he said, hiding the little note very near his heart. "Common courtesy requires me to say farewell before I start for Constantinople. And the captain likes me, and his influence is all-powerful with her, and who knows---"

He did not finish the mental sentence. He rapidly completed his toilet, ordered his horse, and set off hot foot.

Of course, all the short cuts came in requisition. The path through Brithlow Wood was the path he took, going at full gallop. Lost in a deliciously hopeful reverie, he was half-way through, when a hollow groan from the wayside smote his ear.

"For God's sake, help a dying man!"

The baronet stared around aghast. Right before him, under the trees, lay the prostrate figure of a fallen man. To leap off his horse, to bend over him, was but the work of an instant. Judge of his dismay when he beheld the livid, discolored face of Captain Hunsden.

"Great Heaven! Captain Hunsden! What horrible accident is this?"

"Sir Everard," he murmured, in a thick, choking tone, "go---tell Harrie---poor Harrie---"

His voice died away.

"Were you thrown from your horse? Were you waylaid?" asked the young man, thinking of his own recent adventure.

"One of those apoplectic attacks. I was thrown. Tell Harrie---"

Again the thick, guttural accents failed.

Sir Everard raised his head, and knelt for a moment bewildered. How should he leave him here alone while he went in search of a conveyance?

Just then, as if sent by Providence, the Reverend Cyrus Green, in his chaise, drove into the woodland path.

"Heaven be praised!" cried the baronet. "I was wondering what I should do. A dreadful accident has happened, Mr. Green. Captain Hunsden has had a fall, and is very ill."

The rector got out, in consternation, and bent above the prostrate man. The captain's face had turned a dull, livid hue, his eyes had closed, his breathing came hoarse and thick.

"Very ill, indeed," said the clergyman,---"so ill that I fear he will never be better. Let us place him in the chaise, Sir Everard. I will drive slowly, and do you ride on to Hunsden Hall to prepare his daughter for the shock."

The Indian officer was a stalwart, powerful man. It was the utmost their united strength could do to lift him into the chaise.

"Ride---ride for your life!" the rector said, "and dispatch a servant for the family doctor. I fear the result of this fall will be fatal."

He needed no second bidding; he was off like the wind. Sir Galahad sprung over the ground, and reached Hunsden in an incredibly short time. A flying figure, in wild alarm, came down the avenue to meet him.

"Oh, Sir Everard!" Harrie panted, in affright, "where is papa? He left to go to Kingsland Court, and Starlight has come galloping back riderless. Something awful has happened, I know!"

His man's heart burned within him. He wanted to catch her in his arms, to hold her there forever---to shield her from all the world and all worldly sorrow.

Something of what he felt must have shone in his ardent eyes. Hers dropped, and a bright, virginal blush dyed for the first time cheek and brow. He vaulted off his horse and stood uncovered before her.

"Dear Miss Hunsden," he said, gently, "there has been an accident. I am sorry to be the bearer of ill news, but don't be alarmed---all may yet be well."

"Papa," she barely gasped.

"He has met with an accident---a second apoplectic fit. I found him lying in Brithlow Wood. He had fallen from his horse. Mr. Green is fetching him here in his chaise. They will arrive presently. You had better have his room prepared, and I---will I ride for your physician myself?"

She leaned against a tree, sick and faint. He made a step toward her, but she rallied and motioned him off.

"No," she said, "let me be! Don't go, Sir Everard---remain here. I will send a servant for the doctor. Oh, I dreaded this! I warned him when he left this afternoon, but he wanted to see you so much."

She left him and hurried into the house, dispatched a man for the doctor, and prepared her father's room.

In fifteen minutes the doctor's pony-chaise drove up. He and the baronet and the butler assisted the stricken and insensible man up to his room, and laid him upon the bed from which he was never more to rise.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CAPTAIN'S LAST NIGHT.

A young crescent moon rose in the bleak sky; on the shore the flood-tide beat its hoarse refrain, and in his chamber Harold Godfrey Hunsden lay dying.

They knew it---the silent watchers in that somber room---his daughter, and all. She knelt by the bedside, her face hidden, still, tearless, stunned. Sir Everard, the doctor, the rector, silent and sad, stood around.

The dying man had been aroused to full consciousness at last. One hand feebly rested on his daughter's stricken young head, the other lay motionless on the counterpane. His dulled eyes went aimlessly wandering.

"Doctor!"

The old physician bent over him.

"How long?" he paused---"how long can I last?"

"My dear friend---"

"How long? Quick! the truth! how long?"

"Until to-morrow."

"Ah!"

The hand lying on Harrie's dark curls lay more heavily perhaps---that was all.

"Is there anything you wish? anything you want done? any person you would like to see?"

"Yes," the dying man answered, "yes, Sir Everard Kingsland."

"Sir Everard Kingsland is here."

He motioned the baronet to approach.

Sir Everard bent over him.

"Send them away," said the sick man. "Both. I want to speak to you alone."

Ho delivered the message, and the rector and doctor went into the passage to wait.

"Come closer," the captain said, and the young baronet knelt by the bedside, opposite Harrie, "and tell the truth to a dying man. Harrie, my darling, are you listening?"

"Yes, papa."

She lifted her pale young face, rigid in tearless despair.

"My own dear girl, I am going to leave a little sooner than I thought. I knew my death would be soon and sudden, but I did not expect it so soon, so awfully sudden as this!" His lips twitched spasmodically, and there was a brief pause. "I had hoped not to leave you alone and friendless in the world, penniless and unprotected. I hoped to live to see you the wife of some good man, but it is not to be. God wills for the best, my darling, and to Him I leave you."

A dry, choking sob was the girl's answer. Her eyes were burning and bright. The captain turned to the impatient, expectant young baronet.

"Sir Everard Kingsland," he said, with a painful effort, "you are the son of my old and much-valued friend; therefore I speak. My near approach to eternity lifts me above the minor considerations of time. Yesterday morning, from yonder window, I saw you on the terrace with my daughter."

The baronet grasped his hand, his face flushed, his eyes aglow. Oh, surely, the hour of his reward had come!

"You made her an offer of your hand and heart?"

"Which she refused," the young man said, with a glance of unutterable reproach. "Yes, sir; and I love her with my whole heart!"

"I thought so," very faintly. "Why did you refuse, Harrie?"

"Oh, papa! Why are we talking of this now?"

"Because I am going to leave you, my daughter. Because I would not leave you alone. Why did you refuse Sir Everard?"

"Papa, I--I only knew him such a little while."

"And that is all? You don't dislike him, do you?"

"No-o, papa."

"And you don't like any one else better?"

"Papa, you know I don't."

"My own spotless darling! And you will let Sir Everard love you, and be your true and tender husband?"

"Oh, papa, don't!"

She flung herself down with a vehement cry. But Sir Everard turned his radiant, hopeful, impassioned face upon the Indian officer.

"For God's sake, plead my cause, sir! She will listen to you. I love her with all my heart and soul. I will be miserable for life without her."

"You hear, Harrie? This vehement young wooer---make him happy. Make me happy by saying 'Yes.'"

She looked up with the wild glance of a stag at bay. For one moment her frantic idea was flight.

"My love---my life!" Sir Everard caught both her hands across the bed, and his voice was hoarse with its concentrated emotion. "You don't know how I love you. If you refuse I shall go mad. I will be the truest, the tenderest husband ever man was to woman."

"I am dying, Harrie," her father said, sadly, "and you will be all alone in this big, bad world. But if your heart says 'No,' my own best beloved, to my old friend's son, then never hesitate to refuse. In all my life I never thwarted you. On my death-bed I will not begin."

"What shall I do?" she cried. "What shall I do?"

"*Consent!*" her lover whispered.

"Consent!" Her father's anxious eyes spoke the word eloquently.

She looked from one to the other---the dying father, the handsome, hopeful, impetuous young lover. Some faint thrill in her heart answered his. Girls like daring lovers.

She drew her hands out of his clasp, hesitated a moment, while that lovely, sensitive blush came and went, then gave them suddenly back of her own accord.

He grasped them tight, with an inarticulate cry of ecstasy. For worlds he could not have spoken. The dying face looked unutterably relieved.

"That means 'Yes,' Harrie?"

"Yes, papa."

"Thank God!"

He joined their hands, looking earnestly at the young man.

"She is yours, Kingsland. May God deal with you, as you deal with my orphan child!"

"Amen!"

Solemnly Sir Everard Kingsland pronounced his own condemnation with the word. Awfully came back the memory of that adjuration in the terrible days to come.

"She is very young," said Captain Hunsden, after a pause---"too young to marry. You must wait a year."

"A year!"

Sir Everard repeated the word in consternation, as if it had been a century.

"Yes," said the captain, firmly. "A year is not too long, and she will only be eighteen then. Let her return to her old *pension* in Paris. She sadly needs the help of a finishing school, my poor little girl! My will is made. The little I leave will suffice for her wants. Mr. Green is her guardian---he understands my wishes. Oh, my lad! you will be very good to my friendless little Harrie! She will have but you in the wide world."

"I swear it, Captain Hunsden! It will be my bliss and my honor to make her my happy wife."

"I believe you. And now go---go both, and leave me alone, for I am very tired."

Sir Everard arose, but Harrie grasped her father's cold hand in terror.

"No, no, papa! I will not leave you. Let me stay. I will be very quiet---I shall not disturb you."

"As you like, my dear. She will call you, Kingsland, by and by."

The young man left the room. Then Harriet lifted a pale, reproachful face to her father.

"Papa, how could you?"

"My dear, you are not sorry? You will love this young man very dearly, and he loves you."

"But his mother, Lady Kingsland, detests me. And, I want to enter no man's house unwelcome."

"My dear, don't be hasty. How do you know Lady Kingsland detests you? That is impossible, I think. She will be a kind mother to my little motherless girl. Ah, pitiful Heaven! that agony is to come yet!"

A spasm of pain convulsed his features, his brows knit, his eyes gleamed.

"Harrie," he said, hoarsely, grasping her hands, "I have a secret to tell you---a horrible secret of guilt and disgrace! It has blighted my life, blasted every hope, turned the whole world into a black and festering mass of corruption! And, oh! worst of all, you must bear it---your life must be darkened, too. But not until the grave has closed over me. My child, look here."

He drew out, with a painful effort, something from beneath his pillow and handed it to her. It was a letter, addressed to herself, and tightly sealed.

"My secret is there," he whispered---"the secret it would blister my lips to tell you. When you are safe with Madame Beaufort, in Paris, open and read this---not before. You promise, Harrie?"

"Anything, papa---everything!" She hid it away in her bosom. "And now try to sleep; you are talking a great deal too much."

"Sing for me, then."

She obeyed the strange request---he had always loved to hear her sing. She commenced a plaintive little song, and before it was finished he was asleep.

All night long she watched by his bedside. Now he slept, now he woke up fitfully, now he fell into a lethargic repose. The doctor and Sir Everard kept watch in an adjoining chamber, within sight of that girlish form.

Once, in the small hours, the sick man looked at her clearly, and spoke aloud:

"Wake me at day-dawn, Harrie."

"Yes, papa."

And then he slept again. The slow hours dragged away---morning was near. She walked to the window, drew the curtain and looked out. Dimly the pearly light was creeping over the sky, lighting the purple, sleeping sea, brightening and brightening with every passing second.

She would not disobey him. She left the window and bent over the bed. How still he lay!

"Papa," she said, kissing him softly, "day is dawning."

But the captain never moved nor spoke. And then Harriet Hunsden knew the everlasting day had dawned for him.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEAD MAN'S SECRET.

It was a very stately ceremonial that which passed through the gates of Hunsden Hall, to lay Harold Godfrey Hunsden's ashes with those of many scores of Hunsdens who had gone before.

The heir at law---an impoverished London swell---was there in sables and sweeping hat-band, exulting inwardly that the old chap had gone at last, and "the king had got his own again."

Sir Everard Kingsland was there, conspicuous and interesting in his new capacity of betrothed to the dead man's daughter.

And the dead man's daughter herself, in trailing crape and sables, deathly pale and still, was likewise there, cold and rigid almost as the corpse itself.

For she had never shed a tear since that awful moment when, with a wild, wailing cry of orphanage, she had flung herself down on the dead breast as the new day dawned.

The day of the funeral was one of ghostly gloom. The November wind swept icily over the sea with a dreary wail of winter; the cold rain beat its melancholy drip, drip; sky and earth and sea were all blurred in a clammy mist.

White and wild, Harriet Hunsden hung on her lover's arm while the Reverend Cyrus Green solemnly read the touching burial service, and Harold Hunsden was laid to sleep the everlasting sleep.

And then she was going back to the desolate old home---oh, so horribly desolate now! She looked at his empty chamber, at his vacant chair, at his forsaken bed. Her face worked; with a long, anguished cry she flung herself on her lover's breast and wept the rushing, passionate tears of seventeen that keep youthful hearts from breaking.

He held her there as reverently, as tenderly as that dead father might have done, letting her cry her fill, smoothing the glossy hair, kissing the slender hands, calling her by names never to be forgotten.

"My darling---my darling! my bride---my wife!"

She lifted her face at last and looked at him as she never had looked at mortal man before. In that moment he had his infinite reward. She loved him as only these strong-hearted, passionate women can love---once and forever.

"Love me, Everard," she whispered, holding him close. "I have no one in the world now but you."

* * * * *

That night Harrie Hunsden left the old home forever. The Reverend Cyrus drove her to the rectory in the rainy twilight, and still her lover sat by her side, as it was his blissful privilege to sit. She clung to him now, in her new desolation, as she might never have learned to cling in happier times.

The rector's wife received the young girl with open arms, and embraced her with motherly heartiness.

"My poor, pale darling!" she said, kissing the cold cheeks. "You must stay with us until your lost roses come back."

But Harriet shook her head.

"I will go to France at once, please," she said, mournfully. "Madame Beaufort was always good to me, and it was his last wish."

Her voice choked. She turned away her head.

"It shall be as you say, my dear. But who is to take you?"

"Mrs. Hilliard, and---I think---Sir Everard Kingsland."

Mrs. Hilliard had been housekeeper at Hunsden Hall, and was a distant relative of the family. Under the new dynasty she was leaving, and had proffered her services to escort her young mistress to Paris.

The Reverend Cyrus, who hated crossing the channel, had closed with the offer at once, and Sir Everard was to play protector.

One week Miss Hunsden remained at the rectory, fortunately so busied by her preparations for departure that no time was left for brooding over her bereavement.

And then, in spite of that great trouble, there was a sweet, new-born bliss flooding her heart.

How good he was to her--her handsome young lover--how solicitous, how tender, how devoted! She could lay her hand shyly on his shoulder, in these calm twilights, and nestle down in his arms, and feel that life held something unutterably sweet and blissful for her still.

As for Everard, he lived at the rectory. He rode home every night, and he mostly breakfasted at the Court; but to all intents and purposes he dwelt at the parsonage.

"Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also"; and my lady, now that things were settled, and the journey to Constantinople postponed indefinitely, had sunk into a state of sulky displeasure, and was satirical, and scornful, and contemptuous, and stately, and altogether exquisitely disagreeable.

Lady Louise had left Devonshire, and gone back to shine brilliantly in London society once more.

Miss Hunsden went to France with the portly old house-keeper and the devoted young baronet. *Mme.* Beaufort received her ex-pupil with very French effusion.

"Ah, my angel! so pale, so sad, so beautiful! I am distracted at the appearance! But we will restore you. The change, the associations--all will be well in time."

The lonely young creature clung to her lover with passionate abandon.

"Don't go back just yet, Everard," she implored. "Let me get used to being alone. When you are with me I am content, but when you go, and I am all alone among these strangers--"

But he needed no pleading--he loved her entirely, devotedly. He promised anything--everything! He would remain in Paris the whole year of probation, if she wished, that he might see her at least every week.

She let him go at last, and stole away in the dusky gloaming to her allotted little room. She locked the door, sat down by the table, laid her face on her folded arms, and wet them with her raining tears.

"I loved him so!" she thought--"my precious father! Oh, it was hard to let him go!"

She cried until she could literally cry no longer. Then she arose. It was quite dark now, and she lighted her lamp.

"I will read his letter," she said to herself--"the letter he left for me. I will learn this terrible secret that blighted his life."

There was her writing-case on the table. She opened it and took out the letter. She looked sadly at the superscription a moment, then opened it and began to read.

"It will be like his voice speaking to me from the grave," she thought. "My own devoted father!"

Half an hour passed. The letter was long and closely written, and the girl read it slowly from beginning to end.

It dropped in her lap. She sat there, staring straight before her, with a fixed, vacant stare. Then she arose slowly, placed it in the writing-case, put her hand to her head confusedly, and turned with a bewildered look.

Her face flushed dark red; the room was reeling, the walls rocking dizzily. She made a step forward with both hands blindly outstretched, and fell headlong to the floor.

Next morning Sir Everard Kingsland, descending to his hotel breakfast, found a sealed note beside his plate. He opened it, and saw it was from the directress of the *Pensionnat des Demoiselles*.

MONSIEUR,---It is with regret I inform you Mademoiselle Hunsden is very ill. When you left her last evening she ascended to her room at once. An hour after, sitting in an apartment underneath, I heard a heavy fall. I ran up at once. Mademoiselle lay on the floor in a dead swoon. I rang the bell; I raised her; I sent for the doctor. It was a very long swoon---it was very difficult to restore her. Mademoiselle was very ill all night---out of herself---delirious. The doctor fears for the brain. Ah, *mon Dieu!* it is very sad---it is deplorable! We all weep for the poor Mademoiselle Hunsden. I am, monsieur, with profoundest sentiments of sorrow and pity, MARIE JUSTINE CELESTE BEAUFORT.

The young baronet waited for no breakfast. He seized his hat, tore out of the hotel, sprung into a fiacre, and was whirled at once to the *pension*.

Madame came to him to the parlor, her lace handkerchief to her eyes. Mademoiselle was very ill. Monsieur could not see her, of course, but he must not despair.

Doctor Pillule had hopes. She was so young, so strong; but the shock of her father's death must have been preying on her mind. Madame's sympathy was inexpressible.

Harriet lay ill for many days---delirious often, murmuring things pitiably small, calling on her father, on her lover---sometimes on her horses and dogs. The physician was skillful, and life won the battle. But it was a weary time before they let her descend to the parlor to see that impatient lover of hers.

It was very near Christmas, and there was snow on the ground, when she came slowly down one evening to see him. He sat alone in the prime salon, where the porcelain stove stood, with its handful of fire, looking gloomily out at the feathery flakes whirling through the leaden twilight. He turned round as she glided in, so unlike herself, so like a spirit, that his heart stood still.

"My love! my love!"

It was all he could say. He took her in his arms, so worn, so wasted, so sad; wan as the fluttering snow without. All his man's heart overflowed with infinite love and pity as he held that frail form in his strong clasp.

"Dear Everard, I have been so ill and so lonely; I wanted you so much!"

He drew her to him as if he would never let her go again.

"If I could only be with you always, my darling. It is cruel to keep us apart for a year."

"It was poor papa's wish, Everard."

Presently madame came in, and there were lights, and bustle, and separation. *Mme.* Hunsden must not remain too long, must not excite herself. Monsieur must go away, and come again to-morrow.

"I will let her see you every day, poor, homesick child, until she is well enough to go into the *classe* and commence her studies. Then, not so often. But monsieur will be gone long before that!"

"No," Sir Everard said, distinctly. "I remain in Paris for the winter. I trust to madame's kind heart to permit me to see Miss Hunsden often."

"Often! Ah, *mon Dieu!* how you English are impetuous! so---how do you call him?---unreasonable! Monsieur may see mademoiselle in the salon every Saturday afternoon---not oftener."

"It is better so, Everard. I want to study---Heaven knows I need it! and your frequent visits would distract me. Let once a week suffice."

Sir Everard yielded to the inevitable with the best grace possible. He took his leave, raising Harriet's hand to his lips.

Harrie lingered by the window for a moment, looking wistfully after the slender figure, and slow, graceful walk.

"If he only knew!" she murmured. "If he only knew the terrible secret that struck me down that night! But I dare not tell---I dare not, even if that voice from the dead had not forbidden me. I love him so dearly---so dearly! Ah, pitiful Lord! let him never know!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BARONET'S BRIDE.

The winter months wore by. Spring came, and still that most devoted of lovers, Sir Everard Kingsland, lingered in Paris, near his gray-eyed divinity. His life was no dull one in the gayest capital of Europe. He had hosts of friends, the purse of Fortunatus, the youth and beauty of a demi-god. Brilliant Parisian belles, flashing in ancestral diamonds, with the blue blood of the old *regime* in their delicate veins, showered their brightest smiles, their most entrancing glances, upon the handsome young Englishman in vain. His loyal heart never swerved in its allegiance to his gray-eyed queen---the love-light that lighted her dear face, the warm, welcoming kiss of her cherry lips, were worth a hundred Parisian belles with their ducal coats of arms. "Faithful and true" was the motto on his seal; faithful and true in every word and thought---true as the needle to the North Star---was he to the lady of his love.

The weeks went swiftly and pleasantly enough; but his red-letter day was the Saturday afternoon that brought him to his darling. And she, buried among her dry-as-dust school-books and classic lore---how she looked forward to the weekly day of grace no words of mine can tell.

But with the first bright days of April came a change. He was going back to England, he told her, one Saturday afternoon, as they sat, lover-like, side by side, in the prim salon. She gave a low cry at the words, and looked at him with wild, wide eyes.

"Going to England! Going to leave me!"

"My dearest, it is for your sake I go, and I will be gone but a little while. The end of next October our long year of waiting ends, and before the Christmas snow flies, my darling must be all my own. It is to prepare for our marriage I go."

She hid her glowing face on his shoulder.

"I would make Kingsland Court a very Paradise, if I could, for my bright little queen. As I can not make it quite Paradise, I will do what I can."

"Any place is my Paradise so that you are there, Everard!"

"Landscape gardeners and upholsterers shall wave their magic wands and work their nineteenth century miracles," he said, presently, reverting to his project. "My dear girl's future home shall be a very bower of delights. And, besides, I want to see my mother. She feels herself a little slighted, I am afraid, after this winter's absence."

"Ah, your mother!" with a little sigh. "Will she ever like me, do you think, Everard? Her letter was so cold, so formal, so chilling!"

For this high-stepping young lady who had ridden at the fox-hunt with reckless daring, who was so regally uplifted and imperious, had grown very humble in her new love.

Harrie had written to my lady an humble, girlish, appealing little letter, and had received the coldest of polite replies with the "bloody hand" and the Kingsland crest emblazoned proudly, and the motto of the house in good old Norman French, "Strike once, and strike well."

Since then there had been no correspondence. Miss Hunsden was too proud to sue for her favor, and Sir Everard loved her too sensitively to expose her to a possible rebuff.

My lady was unutterably offended by her son's desertion of a whole winter. She was nothing to him now. This bold, masculine girl with the horrible boy's name was his all in all now.

Sir Everard Kingsland met with a very cold reception from his lady mother upon his return to Devonshire. She listened in still disdain to his glowing accounts of the marvels the summer would work in the grand old place.

"And all this for the penniless daughter of a half-pay captain; and Lady Louise might have been his wife."

Sir Everard ran heedlessly on.

"You and Milly shall retain your old rooms, of course," he said, "and have them altered or not, just as you choose. Harrie's room shall be in the south wing---she likes a sunny, southern prospect---and the winter and summer drawing-rooms must be completely refurnished; and the conservatory has been sadly neglected of late, and the oak paneling in the dining-room wants touching up. Hadn't you better give all the orders for your own apartments yourself? The others I will attend to."

"My orders are already given," Lady Kingsland said, with frigid hauteur. "My jointure house is to be fitted up. Before you return from your honey-moon I will have quitted Kingsland Court with my daughter. Permit Mildred and me to retain our present apartments unaltered until that time; then the future Lady Kingsland can have the old rooms disfigured with as much gilding and stucco and ormolu as she pleases."

The young man's fair face blackened with an angry scowl as he listened to the taunting, spiteful speech. But he restrained himself.

"There is no necessity for your withdrawal from your old home. If you leave, it will be against my wish. Neither my wife nor I could ever desire such a step."

"Your wife! Does she take state upon herself already? To you and your wife, Sir Everard Kingsland, I return my humble thanks, but even Kingsland Court is not large enough for two mistresses. I will never stand aside and see the pauper

daughter of the half-pay captain rule where I ruled once."

She swept majestically out of the room as she launched her last smarting shaft, leaving her son with face of suppressed rage, to recover his temper as best he might.

"He will never ask me again," she thought. "I know his nature too well."

And he did not. He went about his work with stern determination, never consulting her, never asking advice, or informing her of any project---always deferential, always studiously polite.

There was one person, however, at the Court who made up, by the warmth of her greeting and the fervor of her sympathy, for any lack on his mother's part. It was Miss Sybilla Silver who somehow had grown to be as much a fixture there as the marble and bronze statues.

She had written to find her friends in Plymouth, or she said so, and failed, and she had managed to make herself so useful to my lady that my lady was very glad to keep her. She could make caps like a Parisian milliner; she could dress her exquisitely; she could read for hours in the sweetest and clearest of voices, without one yawn, the dullest of dull High Church novels. She could answer notes and sing like a siren, and she could embroider *prie-dieu* chairs and table-covers, and slippers and handkerchiefs, and darn point lace like Fairy Fingers herself.

She was a treasure, this ex-lad in velveteen, and my lady counted it a lucky day that brought her to Kingsland. But Miss Sybilla belonged to my lady's son, and not to my lady. To the young lord of Kingsland her allegiance was due, and at his bidding she was ready, at a moment's notice, to desert the female standard.

Sir Everard, who took a kindly interest in the dashing damsel with the coal-black hair and eyes, who had shot the poacher, put the question plump one day:

"My mother and sister leave before the end of the year, Sybilla. Will you desert me, too?"

"Never, Sir Everard! I will never desert you while you wish me to stay."

"I should like it, I confess. It will be horribly dreary for my bride to come home to a house where there is no one to welcome her but the servants. If my mother can spare you, Sybilla, I wish you would stay."

As once before, she lifted his hand to her lips.

"Sybilla belongs to you, Sir Everard! Command, and she will obey."

He laughed, but he also reddened as he drew his hand hastily away.

"Oh, pooh! don't be melodramatic! There is no question of commanding and obeying about it. You are free to do as you please. If you choose to remain, give Lady Kingsland proper notice. If you prefer to go, why, I must look out for some one to take your place. Don't be in a hurry---there's plenty of time to decide."

He swung on and left her.

"Plenty of time to decide," she repeated, with a smile curling her thin lips. "My good Sir Everard, I decided long ago! Marry your fox-hunting bride---bring her home. Sybilla Silver will be here to welcome her, never fear!"

The baronet stayed three weeks in England---then returned impatiently to Paris. Of course the rapture of the meeting more than repaid the pain of parting.

She was growing more beautiful every day, the infatuated young man thought, over her books; and the sun of France shone on nothing half so lovely as this tall, slender damsel, in her gray school uniform and prim, black silk apron.

The summer went. Sir Everard was back and forth across the Channel, like an insane human pendulum, and the work went bravely on! Kingsland was being transformed---the landscape gardeners and the London upholsterers had *carte blanche*, and it was the story of Aladdin's Palace over again. Sir Everard rubbed his golden lamp, and, lo! mighty genii rose up and worked wonders.

September came---the miracles ceased. Even money and men could do no more. October came.

Sir Everard's year of probation was expired. The Reverend Cyrus Green overcame heroically his horror of seasickness and steamers, and went to Paris in person for his ward. As plain Miss Hunsden, without a shilling to bless herself with, the Reverend Cyrus would not by any means have thought this extreme step necessary; but for the future Lady Kingsland to travel alone was not for an instant to be thought of. So he went, and the first week of November he brought her home.

Miss Hunsden---taller, more stately, more beautiful than ever---was very still and sad, this first anniversary of her father's death. Lady Kingsland, when she and Mildred called---for they did, of course---was rather impressed by the stately girl in mourning, whose fair, proud face and calm, gray eyes met hers so unflinchingly. It was "Greek meets Greek" here; neither would yield an inch.

The wedding was to take place early in December---Sir Everard would not wait, and Harrie seemed to have no will left but his. Once she had feebly uttered some remonstrances, but he had imperatively cut her short.

So this young tyrant had everything his own way. The preparations were hurried on with amazing haste; the day was named, the bride-maids and guests bidden.

Miss Hunsden's young lady friends were few and far between, and Mildred Kingsland and the rector's sister and twelve-year-old daughter were to comprise the whole list.

The wedding-day dawned---a sullen, overcast, threatening December day. A watery sun looked out of a lowering sky, and then retreated altogether, and a leaden dullness overspread the whole firmament. An icy wind curdled your blood and tweaked your nose, and feathery snowflakes whirled drearily through the opaque gloom.

The church was full, and silks rustled and bright eyes flashed inquisitively, and people wondered who that tall, foreign-looking person beside my lady might be.

It was Sybilla Silver, gorgeous in golden silk, with her black eyes lighted with cruel, inward exultation, and who glared almost fiercely upon the beautiful bride.

My lady, magnificent in her superb disdain of all these childish proceedings, stood by and acknowledged in her heart of hearts that if beauty and grace be any excuse for folly, her son had those excuses.

Lovely as a vision, with her pure, pale, passionless face, her clear, sweet eyes, Harriet Hunsden swept up the aisle in her rich bridal robes, her floating lace, and virginal orange-blossoms.

The bridegroom's eyes kindled with admiration and pride as he took his place by her side, he looking as noble and gallant a gentleman as England could boast.

It was over---she was his wife! They had registered their names, they drove back to the rectory, the congratulations offered, the breakfast eaten, the toast drunk. She was upstairs dressing for her journey; the carriage and the bridegroom were waiting impatiently below.

Mrs. Green hovered about her with matronly solicitude, and at the last moment Harriet flung herself impetuously upon her neck and broke out into hysterical crying.

"Forgive me!" she sobbed. "Oh, Mrs. Green, I never had a mother!"

Then she drew down her veil and ran out of the room before the good woman could speak. Sir Everard was waiting in the hall. He drew her hand under his arm and hurried her away. Mrs. Green got down-stairs only in time to see her in the carriage.

Then the bridegroom sprung lightly in beside her, the carriage door closed, the horses started, and the happy pair were off.

* * * * *

Sybilla Silver went back to the Court alone. My lady, in sullen dignity, took her daughter and went straight to her jointure house at the other extremity of the village.

She stood in the confer of a lengthy suite of apartments---the new Lady Kingsland's---opening one into the other in a long vista of splendor. She took a portrait out of her breast and gazed at it with brightly glittering eyes.

"A whole year has passed, my mother," she said, slowly, "and nothing has been done. But Sybilla will keep her oath. Sir Jasper Kingsland's only son shall meet his doom. It is through her I will strike; that blow will be doubly bitter. Before this day twelvemonth these two shall part more horribly than man and wife ever parted before!"

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. PARMALEE'S LITTLE MYSTERY.

Kingsland Court had from time immemorial been one of the show-places of the county, Thursday being always set apart as the visitors' day.

The portly old housekeeper used to play cicerone, but the portly old housekeeper, growing portlier and older every day, got in time quite unable to waddle up and down and pant out gasping explanations to the strangers.

So Miss Sybilla Silver, with her usual good nature, came to the rescue, got the history of the old house, and the old pictures, and cabinets, and curiosities, and suits of armor and things by heart, and took Mrs. Comfit's place.

The first Thursday after the marriage of Sir Everard there came sauntering up to the Court, in the course of the afternoon, a tall young gentleman, smoking a cigar, and with his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets.

He was not only tall, but uncommonly tall, uncommonly lanky and loose-boned, and his clothes had the general air of being thrown on with a pitchfork.

He wore a redundance of jewelry, in the shape of a couple of yards of watch-chain, a huge seal ring on each little finger, and a flaring diamond breastpin of doubtful quality.

His clothes were light, his hair was light, his eyes were light. He was utterly devoid of hirsute appendages, and withal he was tolerably good-looking and unmistakably wide awake.

He threw away his cigar as he reached the house, and astonished the understrapper who admitted him by presenting his card with a flourishing bow.

"Jest give that to the boss, my man," said this personage, coolly. "I understand you allow strangers to explore this old castle of your'n, and I've come quite a piece for that express purpose."

The footman gazed at him, then at the card, and then sought out Miss Silver.

"Blessed if it isn't that 'Merican that's stopping at the Vine, and that asked so many questions about Sir Everard and my lady, of Dawson, last night," he said.

Sybilla took the card curiously. It was a *bona-fide* piece of pasteboard, printed all over in little, stumpy capitals:

GEORGE WASHINGTON PARMALEE,
PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTIST,
No. 1060 BROADWAY,
UPSTAIRS.

Miss Silver laughed.

"The gentleman wants to see the house, does he? Of course he must see it, then, Higgins. And he was asking questions of Dawson last night at the inn?"

"Eaps of questions, Miss Silver, as bold as brass, all about Sir Everard and my lady---our young lady, you know. Shall I fetch him up?"

"Certainly."

There chanced to be no other visitor at the Court, and Sybilla received Mr. Parmalee with infinite smiles and condescension.

"Beg your pardon, miss," he said, politely; "sorry to put you to so much trouble, but I calculated on seeing this old pile before I left these parts, and as they told me down at the tavern this was the day---"

"It is not the slightest trouble, I assure you," Miss Silver interposed. "I am only too happy to have a stranger come and break the quiet monotony of our life here. And, besides, it affords me double pleasure to make the acquaintance of an American---a people I intensely admire. You are the first I ever had the happiness of meeting."

"Want to know!" said Mr. Parmalee, in a tone betokening no earthly emotion whatever. "It's odd, too. Plenty folks round our section come across; but I suppose they didn't happen along down here. Splendid place this; fine growing land all round; but I see most of it is let run wild. If all that there timber was cut down and the stumps burned out and the ground turned into pasture, you hain't no idea what an improvement it would be. But you Britishers don't go in for progress and that sort of thing. This old castle, now---it's two hundred years old, I'll be bound!"

"More than that---twice as old. Will you come and look at the pictures now? Being an artist, of course you will like to see the pictures first."

Mr. Parmalee followed the young lady to the long picture-gallery, his hands still in his pockets, whistling softly to himself, and eying everything.

"Must have cost a sight of money, all these fixings," he remarked. "I know how them statues and busts reckons up. This here baronet must be a powerful rich man?"

"He is," said Miss Silver, quietly.

"Beg your pardon, miss, but air you one of the family?"

"No, sir. I am lady Kingsland's companion."

"Oh, a domestic!" said Mr. Parmalee, as if to himself. "Who'd a' thought it? Lady Kingsland's companion? Which of 'em? There's two, ain't there?"

"Sir Everard's mother has left Kingsland Court. I am companion to Sir Everard's wife."

"Ah! jest so! Got married lately, didn't he! Might I ask your name, miss?"

"I am Sybilla Silver."

"Thanky," said Mr. Parmalee, with a satisfied nod. "So much easier getting along when you know a person's name. Married a Miss Hunsden, didn't he---the baronet?"

"Yes. Miss Harriet Hunsden."

"That's her. Lived with her pa, an old officer in the army, didn't she? Used to be over there in America?"

"Yes. Did you know her?"

"Wa-al, no," replied Mr. Parmalee, with a queer sidelong look at the lady; "I can't say I did. They told me down to the tavern all about it. Handsome young lady, wasn't she? One of your tall-stepping, high-mettled sort?"

"Yes."

"And her pa's dead, and he left her nothing? Was poor as a church-mouse, that old officer, wasn't he?"

"Captain Hunsden had only his pay."

"And they've gone off on a bridal tower? Now when do you expect them back?"

"In a month. Are you particularly desirous of seeing Sir Everard or Lady Kingsland?" asked Sybilla, suddenly and sharply.

"Well, yes," he said, slowly, "I am. I'm collecting photographic views of all your principal buildings over here, and I'm going to ask Sir Everard to let me take this place, inside and out. These rooms are the most scrumptious concerns I've seen lately, and the Fifth Avenue Hotel is some pumpkins, too. Oh, these are the pictures, are they? What a jolly lot!"

Mr. Parmalee became immediately absorbed by the hosts of dead-and-gone Kingslands looking down from the oak-paneled walls. Miss Silver fluently gave him names, and dates, and histories.

"Seems to me," said Mr. Parmalee, "those old fellows didn't die in their beds---many of 'em. What with battles, and duels, and high treason, and sich, they all came to unpleasant ends. Where's the present Kingsland's?"

"Sir Everard's portrait is in the library."

"And her ladyship---his wife?"

"We have no picture of Lady Kingsland as yet."

Mr. Parmalee's inscrutable face told nothing---whether he was disappointed or not. He followed Miss Silver all over the house, saw everything worth seeing, and took the "hull concern," as he expressed it, as a matter of course.

"Should like to come again," said Mr. Parmalee. "A fellow couldn't see all that's worth seeing round here in less than a month. Might I step up again to-morrow, Miss Silver?"

Miss Silver shook her head.

"I'm afraid not. Thursday is visitors' day, and I dare not infringe the rules. You may come every Thursday while you stay, and meantime the gardeners will show you over the grounds whenever you desire. How long do you remain, Mr. Parmalee?"

"That's oncertain," replied the artist, cautiously. "Perhaps not long, perhaps longer. I'm much obliged to you, miss, for all the bother I've made you."

"Not at all," said Sybilla, politely. "I shall be happy at any time to give you any information in my power."

"Thanky. Good-evening."

The tall American swung off with long strides. The young lady watched him out of sight.

"There is more in this than meets the eye," she thought. "That man knows something of Harriet---Lady Kingsland. I'll cultivate him for my lady's sake."

After that Mr. Parmalee and Miss Silver met frequently. In her walks to the village it got to be the regular thing for the American to become her escort.

He was rather clever at pencil-drawing, and made numerous sketches of the house, and took the likenesses of all the servants. He even set up a photographic place down in the village, and announced himself ready to "take" the whole population at "half a dollar" a head.

"There's nothing like making hay while the sun shines," remarked Mr. Parmalee to himself. "I may as well do a little stroke of business, to keep my hand in, while I wait for my lady. There ain't no telling how this little speculation of mine may turn out, after all."

So the weeks went by, and every Thursday found the American exploring the house. He was a curious study to Sybilla as he went along, his hands invariably in his pockets, his hat pushed to the back of his head, whistling softly and meditatively.

Every day she became more convinced he knew something of Harrie Hunsden's American antecedents, and every day she grew more gracious. But if Mr. Parmalee had his secrets, he knew how to keep them.

"Can he ever have been a lover of hers in New York?" Sybilla asked herself. "I know she was there two years at school."

But it seemed improbable. Harrie could not have been over thirteen or fourteen at the time.

The honey-moon month passed---the January day that was to bring the happy pair home arrived. In the golden sunset of a glorious winter day the carriage rolled up the avenue, and Sir Everard handed Lady Kingsland out.

The long line of servants were drawn up in the hall, with Mrs. Comfit and Miss Silver at their head. High and happy as a young prince, Sir Everard strode in among them, with his bride on his arm. And she---Sybilla Silver---set her teeth as she looked at her, so gloriously radiant in her wedded bliss.

Mr. Parmalee, lounging among the trees, caught one glimpse of that exquisite face as it flashed by.

"By George! ain't she a stunner? Not a bit like t'other one, with her black eyes and tarry hair. I've seen quadron girls, down South, whiter than Miss Silver. And, what's more, she isn't a bit like---like the lady in London, that she'd ought to look like."

Sybilla saw very little of Sir Everard or his bride that evening. But the next morning, at breakfast, she broached the subject of Mr. Parmalee.

"Wants to take photographic views of the place, does he?" said Sir Everard, carelessly. "Is he too timid to speak for himself, Sybilla?"

"Mr. Parmalee is not in the least bashful. He merely labors under the delusion that a petition proffered by me can not fail."

"Oh, the fellow is welcome!" the baronet said, indifferently. "Let him amuse himself, by all means. If the views are good, I will have some myself."

Mr. Parmalee presented himself in the course of the day.

Sir Everard received him politely in the library.

"Most assuredly, Mr.--oh, Parmalee. Take the views, of course. I am glad you admire Kingsland. You have been making some sketches already, Miss Silver tells me."

Miss Silver herself had ushered the gentleman in, and now stood lingeringly by the door-way. My lady sat watching the ceaseless rain with indolent eyes, holding a novel in her lap, and looking very serene and handsome.

"Well, yes," Mr. Parmalee admitted, glancing modestly at the plethoric portfolio he carried under his arm. "Would your lordship mind taking a look at them? I've got some uncommon neat views of our American scenery, too--Mammoth Cave, Niagry Falls, White Mountains, and so on. Might help to pass a rainy afternoon."

"Very true, Mr. Parmalee; it might. Let us see your American views, then. Taken by yourself, I presume?"

"Yes, sir!" responded the artist, with emphasis. "Every one of 'em; and done justice to. Look a-here!"

He opened his portfolio and spread his "views" out.

Lady Kingsland arose with languid grace and crossed over. Her husband seated her beside him with a loving smile. Her back was partly turned to the American, whom she had met without the faintest shade of recognition.

Sybilla Silver, eager and expectant of she knew not what, lingered and looked likewise.

The "views" were really very good, and there was an abundance of them--White Mountain and Hudson River scenery, Niagara, Nahant, Southern and Western scenes. Then he produced photographic portraits of all the American celebrities--presidents, statesmen, authors, actors, and artists.

Mr. Parmalee watched her from under intent brows as she took them daintily up in her slender, jeweled fingers one by one.

"I have a few portraits here," he said, after a pause, "painted on ivory, of American ladies remarkable for their beauty. Here they are."

He took out five, presenting them one by one to Sir Everard. He had not presumed to address Lady Kingsland directly. The first was a little Southern quadroon; the second a bright-looking young squaw.

"These are your American ladies, are they? Pretty enough to be ladies, certainly. Look, Harrie! Isn't that Indian face exquisite?"

He passed them to his wife. The third was an actress, the fourth a *danseuse*. All were beautiful. With the last in his hand, Mr. Parmalee paused, and the first change Sybilla had ever seen cross his face crossed it then.

"This one I prize most of all," he said, speaking slowly and distinctly, and looking furtively at my lady. "This lady's story was the saddest story I ever beard."

Sybilla looked eagerly across the baronet's shoulder for a second. It was a lovely face, pure and child-like, with great, innocent blue eyes and wavy brown hair--the face of a girl of sixteen.

"It is very pretty," the baronet said, carelessly, and passed it to his wife.

Lady Kingsland took it quite carelessly. The next instant she had turned sharply around and looked Mr. Parmalee full in the face.

The American had evidently expected it, for he had glanced away abruptly, and begun hustling his pictures back into his portfolio. Sybilla could see he was flushed dark red. She turned to my lady. She was deathly pale.

"Did you paint those portraits, too?" she asked, speaking for the first time.

"No, marm---my lady, I mean. I collected these as curiosities. One of 'em---the one you're looking at---was given me by the original herself."

The picture dropped from my lady's hand as if it had been red-hot. Mr. Parmalee bounded forward and picked it up with imperturbable *sang froid*.

"I value this most of all my collection. I know the lady well. I wouldn't lose it for any amount of money."

My lady arose abruptly and walked to the window, and the hue of her face was the hue of death. Sybilla Silver's glittering eyes went from face to face.

"I reckon I'll be going now," Mr. Parmalee remarked. "The rain seems to hold up a little. I'll be along to-morrow, Sir Everard, to take those views. Much obliged to you for your kindness. Good-day."

He glanced furtively at the stately woman by the window, standing still as if turning to stone. But she neither looked nor moved nor spoke.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE PICTURE-GALLERY.

Mr. Parmalee, true to his promise, presented himself at the earliest admissible hour next day with all the apparatus of his art.

So early was it, indeed, that Sybilla was just pouring out the baronet's first cup of tea, while he leisurely opened the letters the morning mail had brought.

Lady Kingsland complained of a bad headache, her husband said, and would not leave her room until dinner.

Sir Everard made this announcement, quietly opening his letters. Sybilla looked at him with gleaming eyes. The time had come for her to begin to lay her train.

My lady had ascended to her room immediately upon the departure of the American, the preceding day, and had been invisible ever since. That convenient feminine excuse, headache, had accounted for it, but Sybilla Silver knew better. She had expected her to breakfast this morning, and she began to think Mr. Parmalee's little mystery was more of a mystery than even she had dreamed. The man's arrival gave her her cue.

"Our American friend is a devotee of art, it seems," she said, with a light laugh. "He lets no grass grow under his feet. I had no easy task to restrain his artistic ardor during your absence. I never knew such an inquisitive person, either; he did nothing but ask questions."

"A national trait," Sir Everard responded, with a shrug. "Americans are all inquisitive, which accounts for their go-aheadativeness, I dare say."

"Mr. Parmalee's questions took a very narrow range; they only comprised one subject---you and my lady."

The young baronet looked up in haughty amaze.

"His curiosity on this subject was insatiable; your most minute biography would not have satisfied him. About Lady Kingsland particularly---in point of fact, I thought he must have known her in New York, his questions were so pointed, and I asked him so directly."

"And what did he say?"

"Oh, he said no," replied Sybilla, lightly, "but in such a manner as led me to infer yes. However, it was evident, yesterday, that my lady had never set eyes on him before; but I did fancy, for an instant, she somehow recognized that picture."

"What picture?" asked the baronet, sharply.

"That last portrait he showed her," Miss Silver answered. "Yet that may have been only fancy, too."

"Then, Miss Silver, have the goodness to indulge in no more such fancies. I don't care to hear your suspicions and surmises, and I don't choose to have my wife so minutely watched. As for this too inquisitive Yankee, he had better cease his questions, if he wishes to quit England with sound bones!"

He arose angrily from the table, swept his letters together, and left the room. But his face wore a deep-red flush, and, his bent brows never relaxed. The first poisonous suspicion had entered his mind, and the calm of perfect trust would never reign there again.

Sybilla gazed after him with her dark, evil smile.

"Fume and fret as you please, my dear Sir Everard, but this is only sowing the first seed. I shall watch your wife, and I will tell you my suspicions and my fancies, and you will listen in spite of your uplifted sublimity now. Jealousy is ingrained in your nature, though you do not know it, and a very little breath will fan the tiny coal into an inextinguishable flame."

She arose, rang the bell for the servant to clear the table, shook out her black silk robe, and went, with a smile on her handsome face, to do the fascinating to Mr. Parmalee.

She found that cautious gentleman busily arranging his implements in the picture-gallery, preparatory to taking sundry views of the noble room. He nodded gravely to the young lady, and went steadfastly on with his work.

"You certainly lose no time, Mr. Parmalee," Miss Silver said. "I was remarking to Sir Everard at breakfast that you were a perfect devotee of art."

"How does the baronet find himself this morning?" he asked.

"As usual---well."

"And her ladyship?" very carelessly.

"Her ladyship is not well. I'm afraid your pretty pictures disagreed with her, Mr. Parmalee."

"Hey?" said the artist, with a sharp, suspicious stare.

"She was perfectly well until you showed them to her. She has been ill ever since. One must draw one's own inference."

Mr. Parmalee busied himself some five minutes in profound silence. Then---

"Where is she to-day? Ain't she about?"

"No. I told you she was ill. She complained of headache after you left yesterday, and went up to her own room. I have not seen her since."

Mr. Parmalee began to whistle a negro melody, and still went industriously on with his work.

"I don't think nothing of that," he remarked, after a prolonged pause. "Fine ladies all have headaches. Knowed heaps of 'em to home---all had it. You have yourself sometimes, I guess."

"No," said Sybilla; "I'm not a fine lady. I have no time to sham headaches, and I have no secrets to let loose. I am only a fine lady's companion, and all the world is free to know my history."

And then Miss Silver looked at Mr. Parmalee, and Mr. Parmalee looked at Miss Silver, with the air of two accomplished duelists waiting for the word.

"He's as sharp as a razor," thought the lady, "and as shy as a partridge. Half measures won't do with him. I must fight him on his own ground."

"By jingo! she's as keen as a catamount!" thought the gentleman, in a burst of admiration. "She'll be a credit to the man that marries her. What a pity she don't belong down to Maine. She's a sight too cute for a born Britisher."

There was a long pause. Miss Silver and Mr. Parmalee looked each other full in the eye without winking. All at once the gentleman burst out laughing.

"Get out!" said Mr. Parmalee. "Go 'long---do! You're too smart for this world---you are, by gosh! Miss Sybilla Silver."

"Almost smart enough for a Yankee, Mr. Parmalee, and wonderfully good at guessing."

"Yes? And what have you guessed this time?"

"That you have Lady Kingsland's secret; that that portrait---the last of the five---is the clew. That you hold the baronet's bride in the hollow of your hand!"

She spoke the last words close to his ear, in a fierce, sibilant whisper. The American actually recoiled.

"Go 'long!" repeated Mr. Parmalee. "Don't you go whistling in a fellow's ear like that, Miss S.; it tickles. Got any more to say?"

"Only this: that you had better make a friend of me, Mr. Parmalee."

"And if I don't, Miss S.? If I prefer to do as we do in euchre, 'go it alone'---what then?"

"Then!" cried Sybilla, with a blaze of her black eyes, "I'll take the game out of your hands. I'll foil you with your own weapons. I never failed yet. I'll not fail now. I'm a match for a dozen such as you!"

"I believe, in my soul, you are!" exclaimed the artist, in a burst of admiring enthusiasm. "You're the real grit, and no mistake. I do admire spunky girls---I do, by jingo! I always thought if I married and fetched a Mrs. George Washington Parmalee down to Maine, she'd have to be something more than common. And you're not common, Miss S.---not by a long chalk! I never met your match in my life."

"No?" said Sybilla, "not even 'down to Maine?'"

"No, by George! and we raise the smartest kind of girls there. Now, Miss Silver, supposing we go partners in this here concern, would you be willing to go partners with a fellow for life? I never thought to marry an English woman, but I'll marry you to-morrow, if you'll have me. What d'ye say? Is it a go?"

"You don't mean it, Mr. Parmalee?" as soon as she could speak.

"I do!" said Mr. Parmalee, with emphasis. "Laugh, if you like. It's kind of sudden, I suppose, but I've had a hankering after you this some time. You're a right smart kind of girl, and jest my style, and I like you tip-top. The way you can roll up them black eyes of yours at a fellow is a caution to rattlesnakes. Say, is it a go?"

Sybilla turned away. Her dark cheeks reddened. There was a moment's hesitation, then she turned back and extended her hand.

"You are not very romantic, Mr. Parmalee. You don't ask me for my love, or any of that sentimental nonsense," with a laugh. "And you really mean it---you really mean to make Lady Kingsland's poor companion your wife?"

"Never meant anything more in my life. It is a go, then?"

"I will marry you, Mr. Parmalee, if you desire it."

"And you won't go back on a fellow?" asked Mr. Parmalee, suspiciously. "You're not fooling me just to get at this secret, are you?"

Sybilla drew away her hand with an offended air.

"Think better of me, Mr. Parmalee! I may be shrewd enough to guess at your secret without being base enough to tell a deliberate lie to know it. I could find it out by easier means."

"I don't know about that," said the artist, coolly. "It ain't likely Lady Kingsland would tell you, and you couldn't get it out of me, you know, if you was twice as clever, unless I chose. But I want you to help me. A man always gets along better in these little underhand matters when he's got a woman going partners with him. I want to see my lady. I want to send her a note all unbeknown to the baronet."

"I'll deliver it," said Sybilla, "and if she chooses to see you, I will manage that Sir Everard will not intrude."

"She'll see me fast enough. I thought she'd want to see me herself before this, but it appears she's inclined to hold out; so I'll drop her a hint in writing. If the mountain won't come to what's-his-name---you know what I mean, Miss Silver. I suppose I may call you Sybilla now?"

"Oh, undoubtedly, Mr. Parmalee! But for the present don't you think---just to keep people's tongues quiet, you know---had we not better keep this little private compact to ourselves? I don't want the gossiping servants of the house to gossip in the kitchen about you and me."

"Just as you please. I don't care a darn for their gossiping, though. And now about that little note. I want to see my lady before I explain things to you, you know."

"And why? You don't intend to tell her I am to be taken into your confidence, I suppose?"

"Not much!" said Mr. Parmalee, emphatically. "Never you mind, Sybilla. Before you become Mrs. P., you'll know it all safe enough. I'll write it at once."

He took a stumpy lead-pencil from his pocket, tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, and wrote these words:

MY LADY,---You knew the picture, and I know your secret. Should like to see you, if convenient, soon. That person is in London waiting to hear from me.

Your most obedient,
G. W. PARMALEE.

The photographer handed the scrawl to Sybilla.

"Read it."

"Well?" she said, taking it all in at a glance.

"Give her this. She'll see me before I leave this house, or I'm much mistaken. She's a very proud lady, this baronet's bride; but for all that she'll obey G. W. Parmalee's orders, or he'll know the reason why."

CHAPTER XIX.

MISS SILVER PLAYS HER FIRST CARD.

It was all very well for Sir Everard Kingsland to ride his high horse in the presence of Miss Sybilla Silver, and superbly rebuke her suspicions of his wife, but her words had planted their sting, nevertheless.

He loved his beautiful, imperious, gray-eyed wife with so absorbing and intense a love that the faintest doubt of her was torture inexpressible.

"I remember it all now," he said to himself, setting his teeth; "she was agitated at sight of that picture. She turned, with the strangest look in her face I ever saw there, to the American, and rose abruptly from the table immediately after. She has not been herself since; she has not once left her room. Is she afraid of meeting that man? Is there any secret in her life that he shares? What do I know of her past life, save that she has been over the world with her father? Good Heaven! if she and this man should have a secret between them, after all!"

The cold drops actually stood on his brow at the thought. The fierce, indomitable pride of his haughty race and the man's own inward jealousy made the bare suspicion agony. But a moment after, and with a sudden impulse of generous love, he recoiled from his own thoughts.

"I am a wretch," he thought, "a traitor to the best and most beautiful of brides, to harbor such an unworthy idea! What! shall I doubt my darling girl because Sybilla Silver thinks she recognized that portrait, or because an inquisitive stranger chooses to ask questions? No! I could stake my life on her perfect truth---my own dear wife."

Impulsively he turned to go; at once he must seek her, and set every doubt at rest. He ascended rapidly to her room and softly tapped at the door. There was no answer. He knocked again; still no response. He turned the handle and went in.

She was asleep. Lying on a sofa, among a heap of pillows, arrayed in a white dressing-gown, her profuse dark hair all loose and disordered, Lady Kingsland lay, so profoundly sleeping that her husband's knocking had not disturbed her. Her face was as white as her robe, and her eyelashes were wet, as though she had cried herself to sleep like a child.

"My love! my darling!" He knelt beside her and kissed her passionately. "And to think that for one second I was base enough to doubt you! My beautiful, innocent darling, slumbering here, like a very child! No earthly power shall ever sunder you and me!"

A pair of deriding black eyes flashed upon him through the partly open door---a pair of greedy ears drank in the softly murmured words. Sybilla Silver, hastening along with the artist's little note, had caught sight of the baronet entering his wife's room. She tapped discreetly at the door, with the twisted note held conspicuously in her hand.

Sir Everard arose and opened it, and Miss Silver's sudden recoil was the perfection of confusion and surprise.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Everard. My lady is---is she not here?"

"Lady Kingsland is asleep. Do you wish to deliver that note?"

With a second gesture of seeming confusion, Sybilla hid the hand which held it in the folds of her dress.

"Yes---no---it doesn't matter. It can wait, I dare say. He didn't mention being in a hurry."

"He! Of whom are you speaking, Sybilla?"

"I---I chanced to pass through the picture-gallery five minutes ago, Sir Everard, and Mr. Parmalee asked me to do him the favor of handing this note to my lady."

Sir Everard Kingsland's face was the face of a man utterly confounded.

"Mr. Parmalee asked you to deliver that note to Lady Kingsland?" he slowly repeated. "What under heaven can he have to write to my lady about?"

"I really don't know, Sir Everard," rejoined Sybilla, "I only know he asked me to deliver it. He had been looking for my lady's maid, I fancy, in vain. It is probably something about his tiresome pictures. Will you please to take it, Sir Everard, or shall I wait until my lady awakes?"

"You may leave it."

He spoke the words mechanically, quite stunned by the overwhelming fact that this audacious photographic person dared to write to his wife. Miss Silver passed him, placed the twisted paper on one of the inlaid tables, and left the room with a triumphant light in her deriding-black eyes.

"I have trumped my first trick," Sybilla thought, as she walked away, "and I fancy the game will be all my own shortly. Sir Everard will open and read Mr. Parmalee's little *billet-doux* the instant he is alone."

But just here Sybilla was mistaken. Sir Everard did not open the tempting twisted note. He glanced at it once as it lay on the table, but he made no attempt to take it.

"She will show it to me when she awakes," he said, with compressed lips, "and then I will have this impertinent Yankee kicked from the house."

He sat beside her, watching her while she slept, with a face quite colorless between conflicting love and torturing doubt.

Nearly an hour passed before Harriet awoke. The great dark eyes opened in wide surprise at sight of that pale, intense face bending so devotedly over her.

"You here, Everard?" she said. "How long have I been asleep? How long have you been here?"

"Over an hour, Harrie."

"So long? I had no idea of going asleep when I lay down; but my head ached with a dull, hopeless pain, and---What is that?"

She had caught sight of the note lying on the table.

"You will scarcely believe it, but that stranger---that American artist---has had the impertinence to address that note to you. Sybilla Silver brought it here. Shall I ring for your maid and send it back unopened, and order him out of the house for his pains?"

"No!" said Harriet, impetuously. "I must read it."

She snatched it up, tore it open, and, walking over to the window, read the scrawl.

"Harriet!"

She turned slowly round at her name spoken by her husband as that adoring husband had never spoken it before.

"Give me that note."

He held out his hand. She crushed it firmly in her own, looking him straight in the eyes.

"I can not."

"You can not?" he repeated, slowly, deathly pale. "Do I understand you aright, Harriet? Remember, I left that note untouched while you slept. No man has a right to address a note to my wife that I may not see. Show me that paper, Harriet."

"It is nothing"---she caught her breath in a quick, gasping, affrighted way as she said it---"it is nothing, Everard! Don't ask me!"

"If it is nothing, I may surely see it. Harriet, I command you! Show me that note!"

The eyes of Captain Hunsden's daughter inflamed up fierce and bright at sound of that imperious word command.

"And I don't choose to be commanded---not if you were my king as well as my husband. You shall never see it now!"

There was a wood-fire leaping up on the marble hearth.

She flung the note impetuously as she spoke into the midst of the flames. One bright jet of flame, and it was gone.

Husband and wife stood facing each other, he deathly white, she flushed and defiant.

"And this is the woman I loved---the wife I trusted---my bride of one short month."

He had turned to quit the room, but two impetuous arms were around his neck, two impulsive lips covering his face with penitent, imploring kisses.

"Forgive me---forgive me!" Harriet cried. "My dear, my true, my cherished husband! Oh, what a wicked, ungrateful creature I am! What a wretch you must think me! And I can not---I can not---I can not tell you."

She broke out suddenly into a storm of hysterical crying, clinging to his neck.

He took her in his arms, sat down with her on the sofa, and let her sob herself still.

"And now, Harriet," he said, when the hysterical sobs were hushed, "who is this man, and what is he to you?"

"He is nothing to me---less than nothing! I hate him!"

"Where did you know him before?"

"Know him before?" She sat up and looked him half angrily in the face. "I never knew him before! I never set eyes on him until I saw him here."

Sir Everard drew a long breath of relief. No one could doubt her truth, and his worst suspicion was at rest.

"Then what is this secret between you two? For there is a secret, Harriet."

"There is."

"What is it, Harriet?"

"I can not tell you."

"Harriet!"

"I can not." She turned deathly white as she said it. "Never, Everard! There is a secret, but a secret I can never reveal, even to you. Don't ask me---don't! If you ever loved me, try and trust me now!"

There was a blank pause. She tried to clasp him, but he held her sternly off.

"One question more: You knew this secret before you married me?"

"I did."

"For how long?"

"For a year."

"And that picture the American showed you is a picture you know."

She looked up at him, a wild startled light in her great gray eyes.

"How do you know that?"

"I am answered," he said. "I see I am right. Once more, Lady Kingsland," his voice cold and clear, "you refuse to tell me?"

"I must. Oh, Everard, for pity's sake, trust me! I can not tell you---I dare not!"

"Enough, madame! Your accomplice shall!"

He turned to go. She made a step between him and the door.

"What are you going to do? Tell me, for I will know!"

"I am going to the man who shares your guilty secret, madame; and, by the Heaven above us, I'll have the truth out of him if I have to tear it from his throat! Out of my way, before I forget you are a woman and strike you down at my feet!"

She staggered back, with a low cry, as if he had struck her indeed. He strode past, his eyes flashing, his face livid with jealous rage, straight to the picture-gallery.

A door at the opposite side of the corridor stood ajar. Sybilla Silver's listening ears heard the last fierce words, Sybilla Silver's glittering black eyes saw that last passionate gesture of repulsion. She saw Harriet, Lady Kingsland---the bride of a month---sink down on the oaken floor, quivering in anguish from head to foot; and her tall form seemed to tower and dilate with diabolical delight.

"Not one year," she cried to her exultant heart---"not one month will I have to wait for my revenge! Lie there, poor fool! and suffer and die, for what I care, while I go and prevent your madly jealous husband from braining my precious fiance. There is to be blood on the hands and the brand of Cain on the brow of the last of the Kingslands, or my oath will not be kept; but it must not be the ignoble blood of George Washington Parmalee!"

CHAPTER XX.

MR. PARMALEE SWEARS VENGEANCE.

Sir Everard strode straight to the picture-gallery, his face pale, his eyes flashing, his hands clinched.

His step rang like steel along the polished oaken floor, and there was an ominous compression of his thin lips that might have warned Mr. Parmalee of the storm to come. But Mr. Parmalee was squinting through his apparatus at a grim, old warrior on the wall, and only just glanced up to nod recognition.

"Morning, Sir Everard!" said the artist, pursuing his work. "Fine day for our business---uncommon spring-like. You've got a gay old lot of ancestors here, and ancestresses; and stunningly handsome some of 'em is, too."

"Spare your compliments, sir," said the baronet, in tones of suppressed rage, "and spare me your presence here for the future altogether! The sooner you pack your traps and leave this, the surer you will be of finding yourself with a sound skin."

"Hey?" cried Mr. Parmalee, astounded. "What in thunder do you mean?"

"I mean that I order you out of my house this instant, and that I'll break every bone in your villainous carcass if ever I catch you inside my gates again!"

The artist dropped his tools and stood blankly staring.

"By ginger! Why, Sir Everard Kingsland, I don't understand this here! You told me yourself I might come here and take the pictures. I call this doosed unhandsome treatment---I do, going back on a feller like this!"

"You audacious scoundrel!" roared the enraged young lord of Kingsland, "how dare you presume to answer me? How dare you stand there and look me in the face? If I called my servants and made them lash you outside the gates, I would only serve you right! You low-bred, impertinent ruffian, how dare you write to my wife?"

"Whew!" he whistled, long and shrill, "that's it, is it? Look here, Sir Everard, don't you get so tearin' mad all for nothing. I didn't write no disrespect to her ladyship---I didn't, by Jupiter! I jest had a little request to make, and if I could have seen her ladyship I wouldn't have writ at all, but she kept out of my way, and---"

"You scoundrel!" cried the passionate young baronet, white with fury, "do you mean to say my wife kept out of your way---was afraid of you?"

"Exactly so, squire," replied the imperturbable foreigner. "She must 'a' known I had something to say to her yesterday when I---- Well, she knowed it, and she kept out of my way---I say it again."

"And you dare tell me there is a secret between my wife and you? Are you not afraid I will throw you out of yonder window?"

Mr. Parmalee drew himself stiffly up.

"Not if I know myself! That is a game two can play at. As for the secret," with a sudden sneer, "I ain't no desire to keep it a secret if your wife ain't. Ask her, Sir Everard, and if she's willing to tell you, I'm sartin I am. But I don't think she will, by gosh!"

The sneering mockery of the last taunt was too much for the fiery young prince of Kingsland. With the yell of an enraged tiger he sprung upon Mr. Parmalee, hurled him to the ground in a twinkling, and twisted his left hand into Mr. Parmalee's blue cotton neckerchief, showering blows with his right fast and furious.

The attack was so swift and savage that Mr. Parmalee lay perfectly stunned and helpless, turning unpleasantly black in the face, his eyes staring, the blood gushing.

Kneeling on his fallen foe, with fiery face and distended eyes, Sir Everard looked for the moment an incarnate young demon. It flashed upon him, swift as lightning, in his sudden madness, what he was about.

"I'll murder him if I stay here," he thought; and as the thought crossed his mind, with a shriek and a swish of silk, in rushed Miss Silver and flung herself between them.

"Good Heaven! Sir Everard, have you gone mad? In mercy's name, stop before you have quite murdered him!"

"Dog---cur!" he cried. "Get up and quit my house, or, by the living light above us, I'll blow your brains out as I would a mad hound's!"

He swung round and strode out of the picture-gallery, and slowly, slowly arose the prostrate hero, with bloody face and blackened eyes.

"Get up, Mr. Parmalee," she said, "and go away at once. The woman at the lodge will give you soap and water and a towel, and you can make yourself decent before entering the village. If you don't hurry you'll need a guide. Your eyes are as large as bishop pippins, and closing fast now."

She nearly laughed again, as she assisted her slaughtered betrothed to his feet Mr. Parmalee wiped the blood out of his eyes and looked dizzily about him.

"Where is he?" he gasped.

"Sir Everard? He has gone, I believe he would have killed you outright only I came in and tore him off. What on earth did you say to infuriate him so?"

"I say?" exclaimed the artist, fiercely. "I said nothing, and you know it. It was you, you confounded Delilah, you mischief-making deceiver, who showed him that air note!"

"I protest I did nothing of the sort!" cried Sybilla, indignantly. "He was in my lady's room when I entered, and he saw the note in my hand. She was asleep, and I tried to escape and take the note with me, but he ordered me to leave it and go. Of course I had to obey. If he read it, it was no fault of mine; but I don't believe he did. You have no right to blame me, Mr. Parmalee."

"I'll be even with him for this, the insulting young aristocrat! I'll not spare him now! I'll spread the news far and wide; the very birds in the trees shall sing it, the story of his wife's shame! I'll lower that cursed pride of his before another month is over his head, and I'll have his handsome wife on her knees to me, as sure as my name's Parmalee! He knocked me down, and he beat me to a jelly, did he? and he ordered me out of his house; and he'll shoot me like a mad dog, will he? But I'll be even with him; I'll fix him off! I'll make him repent the day he ever lifted his hand to G. W. Parmalee!"

"So you shall. I like to hear you talk like that. You're a glorious fellow, George, and Sybilla will help you; for, listen"---she came close and hissed the words in a venomous whisper---"I hate Sir Everard Kingsland and all his race, and I hate his upstart wife, with her high and mighty airs, and I would see them both dead at my feet with all the pleasure in life!"

"You get out!" rejoined Mr. Parmalee, recoiling and clapping his hand to his ear. "I told you before, Sybilla, not to whistle in a fellow's ear like that. It goes through a chap like cold steel. As to your hating them, I believe in my soul you hate most people; and women like you, with big, flashing black eyes, are apt to be uncommon good haters, too. But what have they done to you? I always took 'em to be good friends to you, my girl."

"You have read the fable, Mr. Parmalee, of the man who found the frozen adder, and who warmed and cherished it in his bosom, until he restored it to life? Well, Sir Everard found me, homeless, friendless, penniless, and he took me with him, and fed me, clothed me, protected me, and treated me like a sister. The adder in the fable stung its preserver to death. I, Mr. Parmalee, if you ever feel inclined to poison Sir Everard, will mix the potion and hold the bowl, and watch his death-throes!"

"Go along with you!" said the American, beginning to collect his traps. "You're a bad one, you are. I don't like such lingo---I don't, by George! I never took you for an angel, but I vow I didn't think you were the cantankerous little toad you are! I don't set up to be a saint myself, and if a man knocks me down and pummels my innards out for nothin', I calculate to fix his flint, if I can; but you---shoo! you're a little devil on airth, and that's my opinion of you."

"With such a complimentary opinion of me, then, Mr. Parmalee, I presume our late partnership is dissolved?"

"Nothing of the sort! I like grit, and if you've got rayther more than your share, why, when you're Mrs. Parmalee it will be amusing to take it out of you. And now I'm off, and by all that's great and glorious, there'll be howling and gnashing of teeth in this here old shop before I return."

"You go without seeing my lady, then?" said Sybilla.

"My lady's got to come to me!" retorted the artist, sullenly. "It's her turn to eat humble pie now, and she'll finish the dish, by George, before I've done with her! I'm going back to the tavern, down the village, and so you can tell her; and if she wants me, she can put her pride in her pocket and come there and find me."

"And I, too?" said Sybilla, anxiously. "Remember your promise to reveal all to me, George. Am I to seek you out at the inn, too, and await your sovereign pleasure?"

She laid her hands on his shoulders and looked up in his face with eyes few men could resist. They were quite alone in the vast hall---no prying eyes to see that tender caress. Mr. Parmalee was a good deal of a stoic and a little of a cynic; but he was flesh and blood, as even stoics and cynics are, and the man under sixty was not born who could have resisted that dark, bewitching, wheedling, beautiful face.

The American artist took her in his long arms with a vigorous hug, and favored her with a sounding kiss.

"I'll tell you, Sybilla. Hanged if I don't believe you can twist me round your little finger if you choose! You're as pretty as a picture---you are, I swear and I love you like all creation; and I'll marry you just as soon as this little business is settled, and I'll take you to Maine, and keep you in the tallest sort of clover. I never calk'lated on having a British gal for a wife; but you're handsome enough and spunky enough for a president's lady, and I don't care a darn what the folks round our section say about it. I'll tell you, Sybilla; but you mustn't split to a living soul, or my cake's dough. They say a

woman can't keep a secret; but you must try, if you should burst for it. I reckon my lady will come down handsomely before I've done with her, and you and me, Sybilla, can go to housekeeping across the three thousand miles of everlasting wet in tip-top style. Come to-night; you've got to come to me now."

"I suppose I will find you at the inn?"

"I suppose so. 'Tain't likely," said Mr. Parmalee, with a sulky sense of injury, "you'll find me prancing up and down the village with this here face. I'll get the old woman to do it up in brown paper and vinegar when I go home, and I'll stay abed and smoke until dark. You won't come afore dark, wilt you?"

"No; I don't want to be recognized; and you must be prepared to come out with me when I do. I'll disguise myself. Ah! suppose I disguise myself in men's clothes? You won't mind, will you?"

"By gosh! no, if you don't. Men's clothes! What a rum one you are, Miss Silver? Doosed good-looking little feller you'll make. But why are you so skeery about it?"

"Why? Need you ask? Would Sir Everard permit me to remain in his house one hour if he suspected I was his enemy's friend? Have you any message to deliver to my lady before we part?"

"No. She'll send a message to me during the day, or I'm mistaken. If she don't, why, I'll send one back with you to-night. By-bye, Mrs. Parmalee that is to be. Take care of yourself until to-night."

The gentleman walked down the stair-way alone toward a side entrance. The lady stood on the landing above, looking after him with a bitter, sneering smile.

"Mrs. Parmalee, indeed! You blind, conceited fool! Twist you round my little finger, can I? Yes, you great, hulking simpleton, and ten times better men! Let me worm your secret out of you---let me squeeze my sponge dry, and then see how I'll fling you into your native gutter!"

Mr. Parmalee, on his way out, stopped at the pretty rustic lodge and bathed his swollen and discolored visage. The lodge-keeper's wife was all sympathy and questions. How on earth did it happen?

"Run up against the 'lectric telegraph, ma'am," replied Mr. Parmalee, sulkily; "and there was a message coming full speed, and it knocked me over. Morning. Much obliged."

He walked away. Outside the gates he paused and shook his clinched fist menacingly at the noble old house.

"I'll pay you out, my fine feller, if ever I get a chance! You're a very great man, and a very proud man, Sir Everard Kingsland, and you own a fine fortune and a haughty, handsome wife, and G. W. Parmalee's no more than the mud under your feet. Very well---we'll see! 'Every dog has his day,' and 'the longest lane has its turning,' and you're near about the end of your tether, and George Parmalee has you and your fine lady under his thumb---under his thumb---and he'll crush you, sir---yes, by Heaven, he'll crush you, and strike you back blow for blow!"

True to his word, he ordered unlimited supplies of brown paper and vinegar, rum and water, pipes and tobacco, swore at his questioners, and adjourned to his bedroom to await the coming of nightfall and Sybilla Silver.

The short winter day wore on. A good conscience, a sound digestion, rum and smoke *ad libitum*, enabled our wounded artist to sleep comfortably through it, and he was still snoring when Mrs. Wedge, the landlady, came to his bedside with a

flaring tallow candle, and woke him up.

"Which I've been a-knockin' and a-knockin'," Mrs. Wedge cried, shrilly, "fit to knock the skin off my blessed knuckles, Mr. Parmalee, and couldn't wake you no more'n the dead. And he's a-waitin' down-stairs, which he won't come up, but says it's most particular, and must see you at once."

"Hold your noise!" growled the artist, tumbling out of bed. "What's o'clock? Leave that candle and clear out, and tell the young feller I'll be down in a brace of shakes."

"I couldn't see him," replied Mrs. Wedge, "which he's that muffled up in a long cloak and a cap drawn down that his own mother herself couldn't tell him hout there in the dark. Was you a-expectin' of him, sir?"

"That's no business of yours, Mrs. Wedge," the American answered, grimly. "You can go."

Mrs. Wedge departed in displeasure, and tried again to see the muffled stranger. But he was looking out into the darkness, and the good landlady was completely baffled.

She saw her lodger join him; she saw the hero of the cloak take his arm, and both walk briskly away.

"By George! this is a disguise!" exclaimed Mr. Parmalee. "I wouldn't recognize you at noonday in this trim. Do you know who I took you for until you spoke?"

"Whom?"

"Sir Everard himself. You're as like him as two peas in that rig, only not so tall."

"The cloak and cap are his," Miss Silver answered, "which perhaps accounts---"

"No," he said, "there's more than that. I might put on that cap and cloak, but I wouldn't look like the baronet. Your voices sound alike, and there's a general air---I can't describe it, but you know what I mean. You're no relation of his, are you, Sybilla?"

"A relation of the Prince of Kingsland---poor little Sybilla Silver! My good Mr. Parmalee, what an absurd idea! You do me proud even to hint that, the blue blood of all the Kingslands could by any chance flow in these plebeian veins! Oh, no, indeed! I am only an upper servant in that great house, and would lose my place within the hour if its lordly master dreamed I was here talking to the man he hates."

"And my lady, any news from her?"

"Not a word. She came down to dinner beautifully dressed, but white as the snow lying yonder. She and Sir Everard dined *tete-a-tete*. I take my meals with the housekeeper, now," smiling bitterly. "My Lady Harriet doesn't like me. The butler told me they did not speak six words during the whole time of dinner."

"Both in the sulks," said Mr. Parmalee. "Well, it's natural. He's dying to know, and she'll be torn to pieces afore she breathes a word. She's that sort. But this shyin' and holding off won't do with me. I'm getting tired of waiting, and---and so's another party up to London. Tell her so, Sybilla, with G. W. P.'s compliments, and say that I give her just two more days, and if she doesn't come to book before the end of that time, I'll sell her secret to the highest bidder."

"Yes!" Sybilla said, breathlessly; "and now for that secret, George!"

"You won't tell?" cried Mr. Parmalee, a little alarmed at this precipitation. "Say you won't---never---so help you!"

"Never---I swear it. Now go on!"

* * * * *

An hour later, Sybilla Silver, in her impenetrable disguise, re-entered Kingsland Court. No one had seen her go---no one saw her return. She gained her own room and took off her disguise unobserved.

Once only on her way to it she had paused---before my lady's door---and the dark, beautiful face, wreathed with a deadly smile of hate and exultation, was horribly transformed to the face of a malignant, merciless demon.

CHAPTER XXI.

A STORM BREWING.

Sir Everard Kingsland was blazing in the very hottest of the flame when he tore himself forcibly away from the artist and buried himself in his study. The unutterable degradation of it all, the horrible humiliation that this man and his wife---his---were bound together by some mysterious secret, nearly drove him mad.

"Where there is mystery there must be guilt!" he fiercely thought. "Nothing under heaven can make it right for a wife to have a secret from her husband. And she knew it, and concealed it before she married me, and means to deceive me until the end. In a week her name and that of this low-bred ruffian will be bandied together throughout the country."

And then, like a man mad indeed, he tore up and down the apartment, his hands clinched, his face ghastly, his eyes bloodshot. And then all doubts and fears were swept away, and love rushed back in an impetuous torrent, and he knew that to lose her were ten thousand times worse than death.

"My beautiful! my own! my darling! May Heaven pity us both! for be your secret what it may, I can not lose you---I can not! Life without you were tenfold worse than the bitterest death! My own poor girl! I know she suffers, too, for this miserable secret, this sin of others---for such it must be. She looked up in my face with truthful, innocent eyes, and told me she never saw this man until she met him that day in the library, and I know she spoke the truth! My love, my wife! You asked me to trust you, and I thrust you aside! I spoke and acted like a brute! I will trust you! I will wait! I will never doubt you again, my own beloved bride!"

And then, in a paroxysm of love and remorse, the young husband strode out of the library and upstairs to his wife's room. He found her alone, sitting by the window, in her loose white morning-robe, a book lying idly on her knee, herself whiter than the dress she wore. She was not reading, the dark eyes looked straight before them with an unutterable pathos that it wrung his heart to see.

"My love! my life!" He had her in his strong arms, strained to his breast as if he never meant to let her go. "My own dear Harrie! Can you ever forgive me for the brutal words I used---for the brutal way I acted?"

"My Everard! my beloved husband! My darling! my darling! You are not---you will not be angry with your poor little Harrie?"

"I could not, my life! What is the world worth to us if we can not love and trust? I do love you, God alone knows how well! I will trust you, though all the world should rise up against you!"

"Thank Heaven! thank Heaven! Everard, dearest, I can not tell you---I can not---how miserable I have been! If I lost your love I should die! Trust me, my husband---trust me! Love me! I have no one left in the wide world but you!"

She broke down in a wild storm of womanly weeping. He held her in silence---the hysterics did her good. He only knew that he loved her with a passionate, consuming love, and not ten million secrets could keep them apart.

Presently she raised her head and looked at him.

"Everard, have you---have you seen that man?"

His heart contracted with a sudden sharp pang, but he strove to restrain himself and be calm.

"Parmalee? Yes, Harrie; I left him not an hour ago."

"And he---Everard---for God's sake---"

"He told me nothing, Harrie. You and he keep your secrets well. He told me nothing, and he is gone. He will never come back here more."

He looked at her keenly, suspiciously, as he said it. Alas! the intermittent fever was taking its hot fit again. But she dropped her face on his shoulder and hid it.

"Has he left the village, Everard?" very faintly.

"I can not say. I only know I have forbidden him this place," he replied. "Harrie, Harrie, my little wife! You are very merciless! You are torturing me, and I---I would die to save you an instant's pain!"

At that eloquent cry she slipped out of his arms and fell on her knees before him, her clasped hands hiding her face.

"May God grant me a short life!" was her frenzied cry, "for I never can tell you---never, Everard, not on my dying bed---the secret I have sworn to keep!"

"Sworn to keep!" It flashed upon him like a revelation. "Sworn to whom? to your father, Harrie?"

"Do not ask me! I can tell you nothing---I dare not! I am bound by an awful vow! And, oh, I think I am the most wretched creature in the wide world!"

He raised her up; he kissed the white, despairing face again and again---a rain of rapturous kisses. A ton weight seemed suddenly lifted off his heart.

"I see it all," he cried---"I see it all now! Fool that I was not to understand sooner. There was some mystery, some guilt, perhaps, in Captain Hunsden's life, and he revealed it to you on his death-bed, and made you swear to keep his secret. Am I not right?"

She did not look up. He could feel her shivering from head to foot.

"Yes, Everard."

"And this man has in some way found it out, and wishes to trade upon it, to extort money from you? I have often heard of such things. Am I right again?"

"Yes, Everard," very faint and sad.

"Then, my own dearest, leave me to deal with him; see him and fear him no more. I will seek him out. I will not ask to know it. I will pay him his price and send him about his business."

He rose as he spoke. But Harriet clung to him with a strange, white face.

"No, no, no!" she cried. "It would not do. You could not satisfy him. You don't know---" She stopped distractedly. "Oh, Everard, I can't explain. You are all kindness, all generosity, all goodness; but I must settle with this man myself. Don't go near him---don't ask to see him. It could do no good."

"I am not right, then, after all. The secret is yours, not your father's?"

"Do not ask me! If the sin is not mine, the atonement---the bitter atonement---is, at least. Everard, look at me---see! I love you with all my heart. I would not tell you a lie. I never committed a deed, I never indulged a thought of my own, you are not free to know. I never saw this man until that day in the library. Oh, believe this and trust me, and don't ask me to break my oath!"

"I will not! I believe you; I trust you. I ask no more. Get rid of this man, and be happy once again. We will not even talk of it longer; and---will you come with me to my mother's, Harrie? I dine there, you know, to-day."

"My head aches. Not to-day, I think. What time will you return?"

"Before ten. And, as I have a little magisterial business to transact down in the village, it is time I was off. Adieu, my own love! Forget the harsh words, and be my own happy, radiant, beautiful bride once more."

She lifted her face and smiled---a smile as wan and fleeting as moonlight on snow.

Sir Everard hastened to his room to dress, striving with all his might to drive every suspicion out of his mind.

And she---she flung herself on the sofa, face downward, and lay there as if she never cared to rise again.

"Papa, papa!" she wailed, "what have you done---what have you done?"

All that day Lady Kingsland kept her room. Her maid brought her what she wanted. Sir Everard returned at the appointed hour, looking gloomy and downcast.

His evening at his mother's had not been a pleasant one---that was evident. Perhaps some vague hint of the darkening mystery had already reached The Grange.

"My mother feels rather hurt, Harrie," he said, somewhat coldly, "that you did not accompany me. She is unable to call on you, owing to a severe cold. Mildred is absorbed in waiting upon her, and desires to see you exceedingly. I promised them we would both dine there tomorrow and spend the evening."

"As you please, Everard," she said, wearily. "It is all the same to me."

She descended to breakfast next morning carefully dressed to meet the fastidious eye of her husband. But she ate nothing. A gloomy presentiment of impending evil weighed down her heart. Her husband made little effort to rouse her---the contagious gloom affected him, too.

"It is the weather, I dare say," he remarked, looking out at the bleak, wintery day, the leaden sky, the wailing wind. "This February gloom is enough to give a man the megrims. I must face it, too, for to-day I 'meet the captains at the citadel'---that is to say, I promised to ride over to Major Warden's about noon. You will be ready, Harrie, when I return to accompany me to The Grange?"

She promised, and he departed; and then Lady Kingsland ascended to her own apartment.

While she stood there, gazing at the gray desolation of the February morning, there was a soft tap at the door.

"Come in!" she said, thinking it her maid; and the door opened, and Sybilla Silver entered.

Lady Kingsland faced round and looked at her. How handsome she was! That was her first involuntary thought. Her sweeping black robes fell around her tall, regal figure with queenly grace, the black eyes sparkled with living light, a more vivid scarlet than usual lighted up each dusky cheek. She looked gloriously beautiful standing there. Mr. Parmalee would surely have been dazzled had he seen her.

There was a moment's pause. The two women eyed each other as accomplished swordsmen may on the eve of a duel. Very pale, very proud, looked my lady. She disliked and distrusted this brilliant, black-eyed Miss Silver, and Miss Silver knew it well.

"You wish to speak with me, Miss Silver?" my lady said, in her most superb manner.

"Yes, my lady---most particularly, and quite alone. I beg your pardon, but your maid is not within hearing, I trust?"

"We are quite alone," very coldly. "Speak out; no one can overhear you."

"I do not care for myself," Sybilla said, her glittering black eyes meeting the proud gray ones. "It is for your sake, my lady."

"For my sake!" in haughty amaze. "You can have nothing to say to me, Miss Silver, the whole world may not overhear. If you intend to be impertinent, I shall order you out of the room."

"One moment, my lady; you go too fast. The whole world may not overhear the message Mr. Parmalee sends you by me."

"Ah!" my lady recoiled as though an adder had stung her---"always that man! Speak out, then"---turning swiftly upon her husband's protegee---"what is the message this man sends me by you?"

"That if you do not meet him within two days, he will sell your secret to the highest bidder."

Sybilla delivered, word for word, the words of the American---cruelly, slowly, significantly---looking her still straight in the eyes. Those clear gray eyes flashed with a fierce, defiant light.

"You know all?" she cried.

Sybilla Silver bowed her head.

"I know all," she answered.

Dead silence fell. White as a dead woman, Lady Kingsland stood, her eyes ablaze with fierce, consuming fire. Sybilla made a step forward, sunk down before her, and lifted her hand to her lips.

"He told me all, my dear lady; but your secret is safe with me. Sybilla will be your true and faithful, though humble, friend, if you will let her. Dear Lady Kingsland, don't look at me with that stony, angry face. I have no wish but to serve you."

The gracious speech met with but an ungracious return. My lady snatched her hand away, as though from a snake, and gazed at her with flashing eyes of scorn and distrust.

"What are you to this man, Miss Silver?" she asked. "Why should he tell you?"

"I am his plighted wife," replied Sybilla, trying to call up a conscious blush.

"Ah, I see!" my lady said, scornfully. "Permit me to congratulate you on the excellent execution your black eyes have wrought. You are a very clever girl, Miss Silver, and I think I understand you thoroughly. I am only surprised you did not carry your discovery straight to Sir Everard Kingsland."

"Your ladyship is most unjust," Sybilla said, turning away, "unkind and cruel. I have delivered my message, and I will go."

"Wait one moment," my lady said, in her clear sweet voice, her proud face gleaming with a cynical smile. "Tomorrow evening it will be impossible for me to see Mr. Parmalee---there is to be a dinner-party at the house---during the day still more impossible. Since he commands me to see him, I will do so to-night, and throw over my other engagements. At eight this evening I will be in the Beech Walk, and alone. Let Mr. Parmalee come to me there."

A gleam of diabolical triumph lighted up the great black eyes of Sybilla, but the profound bow she made concealed it.

"I will tell him, my lady," she said, "and he will be there without fail."

She quitted the room, closed the door, and looked back at it as Satan may have looked back at Eden after vanquishing Eve.

"My triumph begins," she said to herself. "I have caught you nicely this time, my lady. You and Mr. Parmalee will not be alone in the Beech Walk to-night."

Left to herself, Harriet stood for a moment motionless.

"She, too," she murmured, "my arch-enemy! Oh, my God, help me to bear it---help me to keep the horrible truth from the husband I love! She will not tell him. She knows he would never endure her from the hour she would make the revelation; and that thought alone restrains her. It will kill me---this agonizing fear and horror! And better so---better to die now, while he loves me, than live to be loathed when he discovers the truth!"

Sir Everard Kingsland, riding home in the yellow, wintery sunset, found my lady lying on a lounge in her boudoir, her maid beside her, bathing her forehead with eau-de-Cologne.

"Headache again, Harrie?" he said. "You are growing a complete martyr to that feminine malady of late. I had hoped to find you dressed and ready to accompany me to The Grange."

"I am sorry, Everard, but this evening it is impossible. Make my excuses to her ladyship, and tell her I hope to see her soon."

She did not look up as she said it, and her husband, stooping, imprinted a kiss on the colorless cheek.

"My poor, pale girl! I will send Edwards with an apology to The Grange, and remain at home with you."

"No!" Harriet cried, hastily; "not on any account. You must not disappoint your mother, Everard; you must go. There, good-bye! It is time you were dressing. Don't mind me; I will be better when you return."

"I feel as though I ought not to leave you to-night," he said. "It seems heartless, and you ill. I had better send Edwards and the apology."

"You foolish boy!" She looked up at him and smiled, with eyes full of tears. "I will be better alone and quiet. Sleep and solitude will quite restore me. Go! Go! You will be late, and my lady dislikes being kept waiting."

He kissed her and went, casting one long, lingering backward look at the wife he loved. And with a pang bitterer than death came the remembrance afterward of how she had urged him to leave her that night.

Thus they parted---to look into each other's eyes no more, in love and trust for a dark and tragic time.

Sybilla Silver, standing at the house door, was gazing out, at the yellow February sun sinking pale and watery into the livid horizon tine, as the baronet ran down-stairs, drawing on his gloves. He paused, with his usual courtesy, to speak to his dependent as he went by.

"The sky yonder looks ominous," he said, "and this wailing, icy blast is the very desolation of desolation. There is a storm brewing."

Miss Silver's black eyes gleamed, and her white teeth showed in a sinister smile.

"A storm?" she repeated. "Yes, I think there is, and you will be caught in it, Sir Everard, if you stay late."

CHAPTER XXII.

AT NIGHT IN THE BEECH WALK.

The instant Sir Everard was out of sight Sybilla ran up to her chamber, and presently reappeared, dressed for a walk.

Even the long, shrouding mantle she wore could not disguise the exquisite symmetry of her graceful form, and the thick brown veil could not dim the luster of her flashing Assyrian eyes. She smiled back, before flitting away, at the dark, bright, sparkling face her mirror showed her.

"You are a very pretty person, my dear Miss Silver," she said---"prettier even than my lady herself, though I say it. Worlds have been lost for less handsome faces than this in the days gone by, and Mr. Parmalee will have every reason to be proud of his wife---when he gets her."

She ran lightly down-stairs, a sarcastic smile still on her lips. In the lower hall stood Mr. Edwards, the valet, disconsolately gazing at the threatening prospect. He turned around, and his dull eyes lighted up at sight of this darkling vision of beauty---for Mr. Parmalee was by no means the only gentleman with the good taste to admire handsome Sybilla.

"Going hout, Miss Silver!" Mr. Edwards asked. "Huncommon urgent your business must be to take you from 'ome such a hevening as this. 'Ow's my lady?"

"My lady is not at all well, Mr. Edwards," answered Sybilla. "Sir Everard was obliged to go alone to his mother's, my lady's headache is so intense. Claudine is with her, I believe. We are going to have a storm, are we not? I shall be obliged to hurry back."

She flitted away as she spoke, drawing down her veil, and disappearing while yet Mr. Edwards was trying to make a languid proffer of his services as escort. He lounged easily up against the window, gazing with calm admiration after her.

"An huncommon 'andsome and lady-looking young pusson that," reflected Sir Everard's gentleman. "I shouldn't mind hasking her to be my missus one of these days. That face of hers and them dashing ways would take helegantly behind the bar of a public."

Sybilla sped on her way down the village to the Blue Bell. Just before she reached the inn she encountered Mr. Parmalee himself, taking a constitutional, a cigar in his mouth, and his hands deep in his trousers pockets. He met and greeted his fair betrothed with natural phlegm.

"How do, Sybilla?" nodding. "I kind of thought you'd be after me, and so I stepped out. You've been and delivered that there little message of mine, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Sybilla; "and she will meet you to-night in the Beech Walk, and hear what you have got to say."

"The deuce she will!" said the artist; "and have her fire-eating husband catch us and set the flunkies at me. Not if I know myself. If my lady wants to hear what I've got to say, let my lady come to me."

"She never will," responded Sybilla. "You don't know her. Don't be an idiot, George---do as she requests. Meet her to-night in the Beech Walk."

"And have the baronet come upon us in the middle of our confab! Look here, Sybilla, I ain't a cowardly feller, you know, in the main; but, by George! it ain't pleasant to be horsewhipped by an outrageous young baronet or kicked from the gates by his under-strappers."

"There is no danger. Sir Everard is not at home, and will not be before ten o'clock at least. He is gone to dine at The Grange with his mother; and my lady was to have gone, too, but your message frightened her, and she told him little white lies, and insisted on his going by himself. And, you silly old stupid, if you had two ideas in your head, you would see that this opportunity of braving his express command, and entering the lion's den to meet his wife by night and by stealth, is the most glorious opportunity of revenge you could have. Sir Everard is nearly mad with jealousy and

suspicion already. What will he be when he finds his wife of a month has lied to him to meet you alone and in secret at the Beech Walk? I tell you, Mr. Parmalee, you will be gloriously revenged!"

"By thunder!" cried the artist, "I never thought of that. I'll do it, Sybilla---I'll do it, so help me! Tell my lady I'll be there right on the minute; and do you take care that confounded baronet finds it out. I said I'd pay him off for every blow, and I'll do it, by the Eternal!"

"And strike through her!" hissed Sybilla, with glittering black eyes, "and every blow will go straight through the core of his proud heart. We'll torture him, George Parmalee, as man never was tortured before."

"What a little devil you are, Sybilla!" he said, with lover-like candor. "I've heard tell that you wimmin knock us men into a cocked hat in the way of hating, and I now begin to think it is true. What has this 'ere baronet done to you, I should admire to know? You don't hate him like the old sarpent for nothing."

"What has he done to me?" repeated Sybilla, with a strange, slow smile. "That is easily told. He gave me a home when I was homeless; he was my friend when I was friendless. I have broken his bread and drunk of his cup, and slept under his roof, and---I hate him, I hate him, I hate him!"

Mr. Parmalee took out his cigar and stared at her in horror.

"I tell you what it is, Miss Silver," he said, "I don't like this sort of thing---I don't, by George! I ain't surprised at a person hating a person, because I hate him myself; but for a young woman that is going to be my wife to cut up like this here, and swear everlasting vengeance---well, I don't like it. You see, wild cats ain't the most comfortable sort of pets a man can have in his house, and how do I know but it may be my turn next?"

"You precious old stupid! As if I could hate you, if I tried. No, no, George; you may trust Sybilla. The wild cat will sheathe her claws in triple folds of velvet for you."

"Humph!" said Mr. Parmalee; "but the claws will still be there. However, I ain't a-going to quarrel with you about it. I like a spunky woman, and I hate him. I'll meet my lady to-night, and you see that my lady's husband finds it out."

"Until then," responded Sybilla, folding her mantle closer about her, "remember the hour---eight sharp---and don't keep her waiting. Before he sleeps to-night the proudest baronet in the realm shall know why his wife deliberately deceived him to meet a strange man by night and by stealth in the park, where her husband had ordered him never to set foot again."

She fluttered away in the chill spring twilight with the last words, leaving her fiance gazing after her with an expression that was not altogether unmixed admiration.

"I'll be darned if I ever met the like of you, Miss Silver, in all my travels. You might be own sister to Lucifer himself for wickedness and revengefulness. I'll find out what's at the bottom of all this cantankerous spite before I make you Mrs. G. W. Parmalee, or I'll know the reason why. It's all very fine to have a handsome wife, with big black eyes and a spunky spirit, but a fellow doesn't want a wife that will bury the carving-knife in him the first time he contradicts her."

Sybilla was a good walker; the last yellow line of the watery February sunset had hardly faded as she tripped up the long drive under the gaunt, tossing trees. Mr. Edwards still lounged in elegant leisure in the hall, conversing with a gigantic young footman, and his fishy eyes kindled for the second time as Sybilla appeared, flushed and bright and sparkling, after her windy, twilight walk.

"I have outstripped the storm after all, you see," she remarked as she went by. "I don't believe we shall have it before midnight. Oh, Claudine! is my lady in her room? I have been on an errand for her down the village."

She had encountered the jaunty little French girl on the upper landing, and paused to put the question.

"Yes," Claudine said. "Madame's headache was easier. She is reading in her dressing-room."

Sybilla tapped at the dressing-room door, then turned the handle and entered. It was an exquisite little *bijou* of a chamber, with fluted walls of rose silk, and delicious plump beauties with bare shoulders and melting eyes, by Greuze. A wood fire flickered on the marble hearth, and was flashed back from lofty mirrors as tall as the room.

Lying back in an arm-chair, her book fallen aimlessly on her lap, her dark, deep eyes looking straight before her into the evening gloaming, my lady sat alone.

The melancholy wash of the waves on the shore, the mournful sighing of the evening wind among the groaning trees, the monotonous ticking of a dainty buhl clock, and the light fall of the cinders sounded abnormally loud in the dead silence of the apartment.

Lady Kingsland turned round at the opening of the door, and her face hardened into that cold look it always wore at sight of her husband's brilliant protegee.

"I have been to the village, my lady," Sybilla said. "I have seen Mr. Parmalee. He will be in the Beech Walk precisely at eight."

My lady bent her head in cold acknowledgment. Sybilla paused an instant, determined to make her speak.

"Can I be of service to you in any way in this matter, my lady?" she asked.

"You?" in proud surprise. "Certainly not. I wish to be alone, Miss Silver. Be good enough to go."

Sybilla's little brown fist clinched itself furiously, once on the landing outside.

"I can't humble her!" she thought. "I can't make her fear me. I can't triumph over her, do what I will. I have her secret and I hold her in my power, but she is prouder than Lucifer himself, and she would let me stand forth and tell all, and if one pleading word would stop me, she would not say it. 'The brave may die, but can not yield!' She should have been a man."

She went to the window and drew out her watch; it wanted a quarter of eight.

"In fifteen minutes my lady goes; in fifteen more I shall follow her, and not alone. I am afraid Sir Everard's slumbers will be rather disturbed to-night."

The last yellow gleam of the dying day was gone, and a sickly, pallid moon glimmered dully among drifts of scudding black clouds. An icy blast wailed up from the sea, and the rocking trees were like dryad specters in writhing agony. The distant Beech Walk looked black and grim and ghostly in the weird light.

A great clock high up in a windy turret struck eight. A moment after the door of my lady's dressing-room opened. A dark, shrouded figure emerged, flitted swiftly down the long gallery, down the stair-way, and vanished.

Ten minutes later Edwards, yawning forlornly, still in the entrance hall, beheld Miss Silver coming toward him with an anxious face, a large shawl thrown over her head.

"Going out again?" the valet exclaimed. "And such a nasty night, too. You are fond of walking, Miss S., and no mistake."

"I'm not going for a walk," said Sybilla. "I am going to look for a locket I lost this afternoon. I was out in the park, in the direction of the Beech Walk, and there I must have dropped it."

"Better wait until to-morrow," suggested Edwards. "The wind's 'owling through the trees, and it's colder than the Harctic regions. Better wait."

"I can not. The locket was a present, and I value it exceedingly. I thought of asking you to accompany me, but as it is so cold perhaps you had better not."

"Oh, I'll go with pleasure!" said Mr. Edwards. "If you can stand the cold, I can, I dessay. Wait till I get my 'at and hovercoat---I won't be a minute."

Miss Silver waited. Mr. Edwards reappeared in a twinkling.

"Adn't I better fetch a lantern?" he suggested. "It will be himpossible to see it, heven if it should be there."

"No," said Sybilla. "The moon is shining, and the locket will glimmer on the snow. Come!"

She took his arm, and they started at a brisk pace for the Beech Walk. The ground, baked hard as iron, rang under their tread, and whether it was the bitter blast or not, Mr. Edwards could not tell, but his companion's face was flushed with a more brilliant glow, in the ghostly moonlight, than he had ever before seen there.

They reached the long grove of magnificent copper-beeches, and just without its entrance Miss Silver began searching for her lost locket.

"It is not here," said Sybilla. "Let us go further down----"

She paused at a sudden gesture of her companion.

"Hush!" he said. "There is some one talking in the Beech Walk."

Both paused and stood stock still. Borne unmistakably on the night wind, voices came to them---the soft voice of a woman, the deeper tones of a man.

"One of the maids, I dare say," Sybilla said, carelessly, "holding tryst with her lover."

"No," said the valet; "not one of the maids would set foot hinside this walk hafter nightfall for a kingdom! They say it's 'aunted. Come forward a little, and let's see if we can't 'ave a look at the talkers. Whoever it is, he's hup to no good, I'll be bound!"

Very softly, stealing on tiptoe, the twain approached the entrance of the avenue. The watery moonlight breaking through a rift in the clouds, shone out for an instant above the trees, and showed them a man and a woman, standing face to face,

earnestly talking. Mr. Edwards barely repressed a cry of consternation.

"Good Lord!" he gasped; "it's my lady!"

"Hush!" cried Sybilla. "Who is the man?"

As if some inward prescience told him they were there, the man lifted his hat at that very instant, and plainly showed his face.

"The Hamerican, by Jove!" gasped the horrified valet. Sybilla Silver's eyes blazed like coals of fire, and the demoniac smile, that made her brilliant beauty hideous, gleamed on her lips.

She grasped the man's arm with slender fingers of iron, and stood gloating over the scene.

Not one word could they hear---the distance was too great---but they could see my lady's passionate gestures; they could see the white hands clasp and cover her face; they could see her wildly excited, even in that dim light. And once they saw her take from her pocket her purse, and pour a handful of shining sovereigns into Mr. Parmalee's extended hand.

Nearly an hour they had stood, petrified gazers, when they were aroused as by a thunder-clap. A horse came galloping furiously up the avenue, as only one rider ever galloped there. Sybilla Silver just repressed a scream of exultation---no more.

"It is Sir Everard Kingsland!" she cried, in a whisper of fierce delight, "in time to catch his sick wife in the Beech Walk with the man he hates!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

MY LADY'S SECRET.

It was quite dark before prudent Mr. Parmalee, notwithstanding Sybilla's assurance that the baronet was away from home, ventured within the great entrance gates of the park. He was not, as he said himself, a coward altogether; but he had a lively recollection of the pummeling he had already received, and a wholesome dread of the scientific hitting of this strong-fisted young aristocrat. When he did venture, his coat-collar was so pulled up that recognition was next to impossible.

Mr. Parmalee, smoking a cigar, made his way to the Beech Walk, and leaning against a giant tree, stared at the moon, and waited. The loud-voiced turret clock struck eight a moment after he had taken his position.

"Time is up," thought the photographer. "My lady ought to be here now. I'll give her another quarter. If she isn't with me in that time, then good-bye to Lady Kingsland and my keeping her secret."

Ten minutes passed. As he replaced his watch a light step sounded on the frozen snow, a shadow darkened the entrance, and Lady Kingsland's pale, proud face looked fixedly at him in the moonlight. He took off his hat and threw away his half-smoked cigar.

"My Lady Kingsland!"

She bowed haughtily, hovering aloof.

"You wished to see me, Mr. Parmalee---that is your name, I believe. What is it you have to say to me?"

"I don't think you really need to ask that question, my lady. You know as well as I do, or I'm mistaken."

"Who are you?" she demanded, impatiently, impetuously. "How do you come to know my secret? How do you come to be possessed of that picture?"

"I told you before. She gave it to me herself."

"For God's sake, tell me the truth! Don't deceive me! Do you really mean it? Have you really seen my-----"

She stopped, shuddering in some horrible inward repulsion from head to foot.

"I really have," rejoined Mr. Parmalee. "I know the---the party in question like a book. She told me her story, she gave me her picture herself, of her own free will, and she told me where to find you. She is in London now, all safe, and waiting---a little out of patience, though, by this time, I dare say."

"Waiting!" Lady Kingsland gasped the word in white terror. "Waiting for what?"

"To see you, my lady."

There was a blank pause. My lady covered her face with both hands, and again that convulsive shudder shook her from head to foot.

"She is very penitent, my lady," Mr. Parmalee said, in a softer tone. "She is very poor, and ill and heart-broken. Even you, my lady, might pity and forgive her if you saw her now."

"For Heaven's sake, hush! I don't want to hear. Tell me how you met her first. I never heard your name until that day in the library."

"No more you didn't," said the artist. "You see, my lady, it was pure chance-work from first to last. I was coming over here on a little speculation of my own in the photographic line, and being low in pocket and pretty well used to rough it, I was coming in the steerage. There was a pretty hard crowd of us---Dutch and Irish and all sorts mixed up there---an' among 'em one that looked as much out of her element as a fish out of water. Any one could tell with half an eye she'd been a lady, in spite of her shabby duds and starved, haggard face. She was alone. Not a soul knew her, not a soul cared for her, and half-way across she fell sick and had like to died."

Mr. Parmalee paused. My lady stood before him, ashen, white to the lips, listening with wild, wide eyes.

"Go on," she said, almost in a whisper.

"Well, my lady," Mr. Parmalee resumed, modestly, "I'm a pretty rough sort of a fellow, as you may see, and I hain't never experienced religion or that, and don't lay claim to no sort of goodness; but for all that I've an old mother over to home, and for her sake I couldn't stand by and see a poor, sufferin' feller-critter of the female persuasion and not lend a helping hand. I nussed that there sick party by night and by day, and if it hadn't been for that nussin' and the little things I bought her to eat, she'd have been under the Atlantic now, though I do say it."

My lady held out her hand, aglitter with rich rings.

"You are a better man than I took you for," she said softly. "I thank you with all my heart."

Mr. Parmalee took the dainty hand, rather confusedly, in his finger-tips, held it a second, and dropped it.

"It was one night, when she thought herself dying, that she told me her story---told me everything, my lady---who she had been, who she was, and what she was coming across for. My lady, nobody could be sorer than she was then. I pitied her, by George, more than I ever pitied any one before in my life. She had been unhappy and remorseful for a long time, but she was in despair. It was too late for repentance, she thought. There was nothing for it but to go on to the dreadful end. Sometimes, when she was almost mad, she---well, she took to drink, you know, and he wasn't in any way a good or kind protector to her---Thorndyke wasn't."

My lady flung up both arms with a shrill scream.

"Not that name," she cried---"not that accursed name, if you would not drive me mad!"

"I beg your pardon!" said Mr. Parmalee; "I won't. Well, she heard of your father's death---*he* told her, you see---and that completed her despair. She took to drink worse and worse; she got out of all bounds---sort of frantic, you see. Twice she tried to kill herself---once by poison, once by drowning; and both times he---you know who I mean---caught her and stopped her. He hadn't even mercy enough on her, she says, to let her die!"

"For God's sake, don't tell me of those horrors!" my lady cried, in agony. "I feel as though I were going mad."

"It is hard," said the artist, "but I can't help it---it's true, all the same. She heard of your marriage to Sir Everard Kingsland next. It was the last thing he ever taunted her with; for, crazed with his jeers and insults, she fled from him that night, sold all she possessed but the clothes on her back, and took passage for England."

"To see me?" asked Harriet, hoarsely.

"To see you, my lady, but all unknown. She had no wish to force herself upon you; she only felt that she was dying, and that if she could look on your face once before she went out of life, and see you well, and beautiful, and beloved, and happy, she could lie down in the dust at your gates and die content.

"She made me write you a line or two that night," continued Mr. Parmalee---"that night which she thought her last---and she begged me to find you and give it to you, with her picture. I have it yet; here they are, both."

He drew from his pocket the picture and a note, and gave them into my lady's hand.

"She didn't die," he resumed; "she got better, and I took her to London, left her there, and came down here. Now, my lady, I don't make no pretense of being better than I am; I took this matter up in the way of speculation, in the view to make money out of it, and nothing else. I said to myself: 'Here's this young lady, the bride of a rich baronet; it ain't likely she's been and told him all this, and it ain't likely her pa has died and left her ignorant of it. Now, what's to hinder my making a few honest pounds out of it, at the same time I do a good turn for this poor, sufferin'. sinful critter here? That's what I said, my lady, and that's what I am here for. I'm a poor man, and I live by my wits, and a stroke of business is a stroke of business, no matter how far it's out of the ordinary run. Your husband don't know this here story; you don't want him to know it, and you come down handsomely and I'll keep your secret."

"You have rather spoiled your marketable commodity, then, Mr. Parmalee. It would have paid you better not to have shared your secret with Sybilla Silver."

"She's told you, has she?" said the artist, rather surprised. "Now that's what I call mean. You don't think she'll peach to Sir Everard, do you?"

"I think it extremely likely that she will. She hates me, Mr. Parmalee, and Miss Silver would do a good deal for a person she hates. You should have waited until she became Mrs. Parmalee before making her the repository of your valuable secrets."

"It's no good talking about it now, however," said Mr. Parmalee, rather doggedly. "I've told her, and it can't be helped. And now, my lady, I don't want to be caught here, and it's getting late, and what are you going to give a fellow for all his trouble?"

"What will hardly repay you," said my lady, "for I have very little of my own, as you doubtless have informed yourself ere this. What I have you have earned and shall receive. At the most it will not exceed three hundred pounds. Of my husband's money not one farthing shall any one ever receive from me for keeping a secret of mine."

"I must have more than that," he said, resolutely. "Three hundred pounds is nothing to a lady like you."

"It is all I have---all I can give you, and to give you that I must sell the trinkets my dear dead father gave me. But it is for his sake I do it---to preserve his secret. My jewels, my diamonds, my husband's gifts I will not touch, nor one farthing of his money will you ever receive. You entirely mistake me, Mr. Parmalee. My secret I will keep from him while I can; I swore a solemn oath by my father's death-bed to do so. But to pay you with his money---to bribe you to deceive him with his gold---I never will. I would die first."

She stood before him erect, defiant, queenly.

Mr. Parmalee frowned darkly.

"Suppose I go to him then, my lady---suppose I pour this nice little story into his ear---what then?"

"Then," she exclaimed, in tones of ringing scorn, "you will receive nothing. His servants will thrust you from his gates. No, Mr. Parmalee, if money be your object you will make a better bargain with me than with him. What is mine you shall have---every farthing I own, every trinket I possess---on condition that you depart and never trouble me more. That is all I can do---all I will do. Decide which you prefer."

"There is no choice," replied the American, sullenly; "half a loaf is better than nothing. I'll take the three hundred pounds. And now, my lady, what do you mean to do about her? She wants to see you."

"See me!" An expression of horror swept over my lady's face. "Not for ten thousand worlds!"

"Well, now, I call that hard," said Mr. Parmalee. "I don't care what she's done or what she's been, it's hard! She's sorry now, and no one can be more than that. I take an interest in that unfortunate party, my lady; and if you knew how she hankers after a sight of you---how poor and ill and heart-broken she is---how she longs to hear you say once, 'I forgive you,' before she dies---well, you wouldn't be so hard."

"Stop---stop!" Lady Kingsland exclaimed.

She turned away, leaning against a tree, her face more ghastly than the face of a dead woman.

Mr. Parmalee watched her. He could see the fierce struggle that shook her from head to foot.

"Don't be hard on her!" he pleaded. "She's very humble now, and fallen very low. She won't live long, and you'll be happier on your own death-bed, my lady, for forgiving her poor soul!"

She put out her hand blindly and took his.

"I will see her," she said, hoarsely. "May God forgive her and pity me! Fetch her down here, Mr. Parmalee, and I will see her."

"Yes, my lady; but as I'm rather short of funds, perhaps---"

She drew out her purse and poured its glittering contents into his palm.

"It is all I have now; when you return I will have the three hundred pounds. You must take her back to New York. She and I must never meet again---for my husband's sake."

"I understand, my lady. I'll do what I can. I'll take her back, and I'll trouble you no more."

His last words were drowned in the gallop of Sir Galahad up the avenue.

"It is my husband," my lady exclaimed. "I must leave you. When will you---and she---return?"

"In two days we will be here. I'll give out she's a sister of mine at the inn, and I'll send you word and arrange a meeting."

Mr. Parmalee drew down his hat and strode away. Weak, trembling, my lady leaned for a few moments against a tree, trying to recover herself, then turned slowly and walked back to the house to meet her husband.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MISS SILVER BREAKS THE NEWS.

The Grange, the jointure house of the Dowager Lady Kingsland, stood, like all such places, isolated and alone, at the furthest extremity of the village. It was a dreary old building enough, weather-beaten and brown, with primly laid-out grounds, and row upon row of stiff poplars waving in the wintery wind. A lonely, forlorn old place---a vivid contrast to the beauty and brightness of Kingsland Court; and from the first day of her entrance, Lady Kingsland, senior, hated her daughter-in-law with double hatred and rancor.

"For the pauper half-pay officer's bold-faced daughter we must drag out our lives in this horrible place!" she burst out, bitterly. "While Harriet Hunsden reigns *en princesse* amid the splendors of our ancestral home, we must vegetate in this rambling, dingy old barn. I'll never forgive your brother, Mildred---I'll never forgive him as long as I live for marrying that creature!"

"Dear mamma," the gentle voice of Milly pleaded, "you must not blame Everard. He loves her, and she is as beautiful as an angel. It would have been all the same if he had married Lady Louise, you know. We would still have had to quit Kingsland Court."

"Kingsland Court would have had an earl's daughter for its mistress in that case. But to think that this odious, fox-hunting, steeple-chase-riding, baggage-cart-following *fille du regiment* should rule there, while we--Oh, it sets me wild only to think of it!"

"Don't think of it, then, mamma," coaxed Mildred. "We will make this wilderness 'blossom as the rose' next summer. As for Harrie, you don't know her yet--you will like her better when you do!"

"I shall never like her!" Lady Kingsland replied, with bitterness. "I don't want to like her! She is a proud upstart, and I sincerely hope she may make Everard see his folly in throwing himself away before the honey-moon is ended."

It was quite useless for Mildred to try to combat her mother's fierce resentment. Day after day she wandered through the desolate, draughty rooms, bewailing her hard lot, regretting the lost glories of Kingsland, and nursing her resentment toward her odious daughter-in-law; and when the bridal pair returned, and Milly timidly suggested the propriety of calling, my lady flatly refused.

"I never will!" she said, spitefully. "I'll never call on Captain Hunsden's daughter. I never countenanced the match before he made it. I shall not countenance it now when she has usurped my place. She should never have been received in society--a person whose mother was no better than she ought, to be."

"But, mamma--"

"Hold your tongue, Milly! You always were a little fool! I tell you I will not call on my son's wife, and no more shall you. Let her come here."

My lady adhered to her resolution with iron force, and received her son, when the day after his return he rode over, with freezing formality. But with all that, she was none the less deeply displeased when he called and came to dinner and left his bride at home.

"My humble house is not worthy my lady's presence, I dare say," she remarked. "After the magnificence of barrack life and the splendor of Hunsden Hall, I scarcely wonder she can not stoop to your mother's jointure house. A lady in her position must draw the line somewhere."

"You are unjust, mother," her son said, striving to speak calmly. "You always were unjust to Harriet. If you will permit us, we will both do ourselves the pleasure of dining with you to-morrow."

"It shall be precisely as the Prince and Princess of Kingsland please. My poor board will be only too much honored."

"It is natural, I suppose," he thought, riding homeward. "The contrast between Kingsland Court and The Grange is striking. She is jealous and angry and hurt--poor mother! Harrie must come with me to-morrow, and try to please her."

But when to-morrow came Harrie had a headache, and the baronet was obliged to go alone.

There was an ominous light in his mother's eyes, and a look of troubled inquiry in Mildred's face that told him a revelation was coming.

His mother's eyes transfixed him the instant he appeared.

"I thought your wife was coming?"

"Harriet had a shocking bad headache. She has been ill all day," he replied, hastily. "It was quite impossible for her to leave her room. She regrets-----"

"That will do, Everard!" His mother rose as she spoke, with a short laugh. "I understand it all. Don't trouble yourself to explain. Let us go to the dining-room---dinner waits."

"But, my dear mother, it is really as I say. Harrie is ill."

"Ill? Yes, ill of a guilty conscience, perhaps! Such a mother---such a daughter! I always knew how this mad *mesalliance* would end. I don't know that I am surprised. I don't know that I regret it. I am only sorry that my son's wife should be the first to disgrace the name of Kingsland!"

"Disgrace? Take care, mother! That is an ugly word."

"It is. But, however ugly, it is always best to call these things by their right names."

"These things! What under heaven do you mean?"

"Do you really need to ask?" she said, with cold contempt. "Are you indeed so blind where this woman is concerned? Why, my son's wife is the talk of the town, and my son sits here and asks me what I mean?"

"Mamma! mamma!" Mildred said, imploringly. "Pray don't! You are cruel! Don't say such dreadful things!"

"Your mother is cruel, and unjust, and unnatural!" he said, in a hard, hoarse voice. "Do you tell me what she means, Mildred."

"Don't ask me, Everard!" Mildred said, in distress. "We have heard cruel, wicked stories---false, I know---about Harrie and---and a stranger---an American gentleman---who is stopping at the Blue Bell Inn."

"Yes, Everard," his mother said, pity for him, hatred of his wife, strangely mingled in look and tone, "your bride of a month is the talk of the place. The names of Lady Kingsland and this unknown man go whispered together from lip to lip."

"What do they say?"

"Nothing!" Mildred exclaimed, indignantly---"nothing but their own base suspicions! She nearly fainted at first sight of him. He showed her a picture, and she ran out of the room and fell into hysterics. Since then he has written to her, and mysterious personages---females in disguise---visit him at the Blue Bell. That is what they whisper, Everard; nothing more."

"Nothing more!" echoed her mother. "Quite enough, I think. What would you have, Miss Kingsland? Everard, who is this man?"

"You appear to know more than I do, mother. He is an American---a traveling photograph artist---and my wife never laid eyes on him until she saw him, the day after our arrival, in the library. As to the fainting and the hysterics, I chanced to be in the library all through that first interview, and I saw neither one nor the other. I am sorry to spoil the pretty romance in which you take such evident delight, my good, kind, charitable mother; but truth obliges me to tell you it is a fabrication from beginning to end. And now, if you will be good enough to tell me the name of the originator of this

report, you will confer upon me the last favor I shall ever ask of you. My wife's honor is mine; and neither she nor I will ever set foot in a house where such stories are credited---not only credited, but exulted in. Tell me the name of your tale-maker, Lady Kingsland, and permit me to wish you good-evening."

"Everard!" his sister cried, in agony.

But he cut her short with an impatient wave of his hand.

"Hush, Mildred; let my mother speak."

"I have nothing to say." She stood haughtily before him, and they looked each other full in the face, mother and son. "My tale-maker is the whole town. You can not punish them all, Sir Everard. There is truth in this story, or it never would have originated; and he has written to her---that is beyond a doubt. He had told it himself, and shown her reply."

"It is as false as hell!" His eyes blazed like coals of fire. "My wife is as pure as the angels, and any one who dares doubt that purity, even though it be the mother who bore me, is my enemy to the death!"

He dashed out of the house, mounted Sir Galahad, and rode away as if Satan and his hosts were after him.

"Mamma! mamma!" Mildred cried, in unutterable reproach, "what have you done?"

"Told him the truth, child. It is better he should know it, although that knowledge parts us forever."

Like a man gone mad the young baronet galloped home. The sickly glimmer of the fitful moon shone on a face that would never be more ghastly in his coffin---on strained eyes and compressed lips. It seemed to him but an instant from the time he quitted The Grange until he dashed up the avenue at Kingsland, leaped off his foaming bay, and strode into the house. Straight to his wife's room he went, fierce, invincible determination in every line of his rigid face.

"She shall tell me all---she shall, by Heaven!" he cried.

He entered her dressing-room---she was, not there; her boudoir---she was not there; her bedroom---it too was empty. He seized the bell and nearly tore it down. Claudine, the maid, looked in with a startled face.

"Where is your mistress?"

The girl gazed round with a bewildered air.

"Is my lady not here, sir? She sent me away over an hour ago. She was lying down in her dressing-room; she said she was ill."

He looked at her for a moment---it was evident she was telling the simple truth.

"Send Miss Silver here."

"I am not sure that Miss Silver is in the house, Sir Everard. I saw her go out with Edwards some time ago but I will go and see."

Claudine departed. Five minutes passed---ten; he stood rigid as stone. Then came steps---hurried, agitated---the footsteps of a man and a woman.

He strode out and confronted them---Edwards, his valet, and Sybilla Silver. Both were dressed as from a recent walk; both wore strangely pale and agitated faces.

Edwards barely repressed a cry at sight of his master.

"What is it?" Sir Everard asked.

The valet looked at Sybilla in blank terror. Miss Silver covered her face with both hands and turned away.

"What is it?" the baronet repeated, in a dull, thick voice. "Where is my wife?"

"Sir Everard, I---I don't know how---she---she is not in the house."

"Where is she?"

"She is---in the grounds."

"Where?"

"In the Beech Walk."

"With whom?"

"With Mr. Parmalee."

There was dead pause. Sybilla clasped her hands and looked imploringly up in his face.

"Don't be angry with us, Sir Everard; we could not help seeing them. I lost a locket, and Edwards came to help me look for it. It was by the merest chance we came upon them in the Beech Walk."

"I am not angry. Did they see you?"

"No, Sir Everard."

"Did you hear what they said?"

"No, Sir Everard; we would not have listened. They were talking; my lady seemed dreadfully agitated, appealing to him as it appeared, while he was cool and indifferent. Just before we came away we saw her give him all the money in her purse. Ah, here she is now! For pity's sake, do not betray us, Sir Everard!"

She flitted away like a swift, noiseless ghost, closely followed by the valet. And an instant later Lady Kingsland wild and pale, and shrouded in a long mantle turned to enter her dressing-room, and found herself face to face with her wronged husband.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BREAKING OF THE STORM.

She looked at him and recoiled with a cry of dismay. He stood before her so ghastly, so awful, that with a blind, unthinking motion of intense terror she put out both hands as if to keep him off.

"You have reason to fear me!" he said, in a hoarse, unnatural voice. "Wives have been murdered for less than this!"

Sybilla and Edwards heard the ominous words, and looked blankly in each other's faces. They heard no more. The baronet caught his wife's wrist in a grasp of iron, drew her into the dressing-room, and closed the door. He stood with his back to it, gazing at her, his blue eyes filled with lurid rage.

"Where have you been?"

He asked the question in a voice more terrible from its menacing calm than any wild outburst of fury.

"In the Beech Walk," she answered, promptly.

"With whom?"

"With Mr. Parmalee."

Her glance never fell. She looked at him proudly, unquailingly, full in the face. The look in his flaming eyes, the tone of his ominous voice, were bitterly insulting, and with insult her imperious spirit rose.

"And you dare stand before me---you dare look me in the face," he said, "and tell me this?"

"I dare!" she said, proudly. "You have yet to learn what I dare do, Sir Everard Kingsland!"

She drew herself up in her beauty and her pride, erect and defiant. Her long hair fell loose and unbound, her face was colorless as marble; but her dark eyes were flashing with anger and wounded pride, and at her brightest she had never looked more beautiful than she did now.

"So beautiful and so lost!" he said, bitterly. "So utterly deceitful and depraved! Surely what they tell of her mother must be true. The taint of dishonor is in the blood!"

The change was instantaneous. The pallor of her face turned to a burning red. She clasped her hands with a sudden spasm over her heart.

"My mother!" she gasped. "What do you say of her?"

"What they say of you---that she was a false and wicked wife. Deny it if you can."

"No," she said, with an imperial gesture of scorn, "I deny nothing. If my husband can believe such a vile slander of his wife of a month, let it be. I scorn to deny what he credits so easily."

"I am afraid it would tax even your invention, my lady, to deny these very plain facts. I leave you in your room, too ill to leave it, too ill by far to ride with me to my mother's, but not too ill to get up and meet your lover---shall I say it, madame?---clandestinely in the Beech Walk as soon as I am gone! You should be a little more careful, madame, and

make sure before you hold those confidential *tete-a-tetes*, that the servants are not listening and looking on. Lady Kingsland and Mr. Parmalee are the talk of the county already. To-night's meeting will be a last *bonne bouche* added to the spicy dish of scandal."

"Have you done?" she said, whiter than ashes. "Have you any more insults to offer?"

"Insults!" the baronet repeated, hoarse with passion. "You do well, madame, to talk of insults---lost, fallen creature that you are! You have dishonored an honorable name; betrayed a husband who loved and trusted you with all his heart; blighted and ruined his life; covered him with disgrace! And you stand there and talk of insult! I have loved you as man never loved woman before, but God help you, Harriet Kingsland, if I had a pistol now!"

She fell down on her knees before him.

"Kill me!" she cried. "I am here at your feet---have mercy and stab me to the heart, but do not drive me mad with your horrible reproaches! May God forgive me if I have brought dishonor upon you, for I never meant it! Never---never---so help me Heaven!"

"Rise, madame! Kneel to Him who will judge you for your baseness; it is too late to kneel to me! Oh, great God! to think how I have loved this woman, and how bitterly she has deceived me!"

The unutterable agony of his tone to her dying day Harriet Kingsland might never forget.

"I loved her and I trusted her! I would have died to save her one hour of pain, and this is my reward! Dishonored---disgraced---my life blighted---my heart broken---deceived from first to last!"

"No, no, no!" she shrieked aloud. "I swear it to you, Everard! I am guiltless! By all my hopes of heaven, I am your true, your faithful, your loving wife!"

He turned and looked up at her in white amaze. Truth, that no living being could doubt, was stamped in agony on that upturned, beautiful face.

"Hear me, Everard!" she cried---"my own beloved husband! I met this man to-night because he holds a secret I am sworn to keep, and that places me in his power. But, by all that is high and holy, I have told you the simple truth about him! I never saw him in all my life until I saw him that day in the library. I have never set eyes on him since, except for an hour to-night. Oh, believe me, Everard or I shall die here at your feet!"

"And you never wrote to him?" he asked.

"Never---never!"

"Nor he to you?"

"Once---the scrawl you saw Sybilla Silver fetch me. I never wrote---I never sent him even a message."

"No? How, then, came you two to meet to-night?"

"He wished to see me---to extort money from me for the keeping of this secret---and he sent word by Sybilla Silver. My answer was, 'I will be in the Beech Walk at eight tonight. If he wishes to see me let him come to me there.'"

"Then you own to have deliberately deceived me? The pretended headache was---a lie?"

"No; it was true. It aches still, until I am almost blind with the pain. Oh, Everard, be merciful! Have a little pity for me, for I love you, and I am the most wretched creature alive!"

"You show your love in a singular way, my Lady Kingsland. It is not by keeping guilty secrets from your husband---by meeting other men by night and by stealth in the grounds---that you are to convince me of your love. Tell me what this mystery means. I command you, by your wifely obedience, tell me this secret at once!"

"I can not!"

"You mean you will not."

"I can not."

"It is a secret of guilt and of shame? Tell me the truth?"

"It is; but the guilt is not mine. The shame---the bitter shame---and the burning expiation, God help me, are!"

"And you refuse to tell me?"

"Everard, I have sworn!" she cried out, wildly. "Would you have me break a death-bed oath?"

"I would have you break ten thousand such oaths," he exclaimed, "when they stand between you and your husband! Harriet Hunsden, your dead father was a villain!"

She sprung to her feet---she had been kneeling all this time---and confronted him like a Saxon pythoness. Her great gray eyes actually flashed fire.

"Go!" she cried. "Leave me this instant! Were you ten times my husband, you should never insult the memory of the best, the noblest, the most devoted of fathers! I will never forgive you the words you have spoken until my dying day!"

"*You* forgive!" he retorted, with sneering scorn, stung out of all generosity. "Forgiveness is no word for such lips as yours, Lady Kingsland! Keep your guilty secret, or your father's or your mother's, whosoever it may be; but not as my wife! No, madame! when the world begins to point the finger of scorn, through her own evil-doing, at the woman I have married, then from that hour she is no longer my wife. The law of divorce shall free you and your secrets together; but until that freedom comes, I command you to meet this man no more! On your peril you write to him, or speak to him, or meet him again. If you do, by the living Lord, I will murder you both!"

He dashed out of the room like a man gone mad, leaving her standing petrified in the middle of the floor.

One instant she stood, the room heaving, the walls rocking around her; then, with a low, moaning cry, she tottered blindly forward and fell like a stone to the floor.

The storm burst at midnight. A gale surged through the trees with a noise like thunder; the rain fell in torrents. And while rain and wind beat tempestuously over the earth and the roaring sea, the husband paced up and down the library, with clinched teeth and locked hands and death-like face---for the time utterly mad---and the wife lay alone in her luxuriant room, deaf and blind to the tempest, in a deep swoon.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THE PERSON IN LONDON."

The February day was closing in London in a thick, clammy, yellow fog. No keen frost, no sparkling stars brightened the chill spring twilight; the sky, where it could be seen, was of a uniform leaden tint, the damp mist wet you to the bone, and a long, lamentable blast whistled around the corners and pierced chillingly through the thickest wraps, and passengers strode through the greasy black mud with surly faces and great-coats and the inevitable London umbrella.

At the window of a dull and dirty little lodging a woman sat, in this dark gloaming, gazing out at the passers-by. The house had a perpetual odor of onions and cabbage and dinner, as it is in the nature of such houses to have, and the room, "first floor front," was in the last stage of lodging-house shabbiness and discomfort.

The woman was quite alone---a still, dark figure sitting motionless by the grimy window. She might have been carved in stone, so still she sat---so still she had sat for more than two hours.

Her dress was black, of the poorest sort, frayed and worn, and she shivered under a threadbare shawl drawn close around her shoulders. Yet, in spite of poverty and sickness, and despair and middle age, the woman was beautiful still, with a dark and haggard and wild sort of beauty that would have haunted one to one's dying day.

In her youth, and her first freshness and innocence, she must have been lovely as a dream; but that loveliness was all gone now.

The listless hands lay still, the great, glittering dark eyes stared blankly at the dingy houses opposite, at the straggling pedestrians, at the thickening gloom. The short February day was almost night now, the street-lamps flared yellow and dull athwart the clammy fog.

"Another day," the woman murmured, "another endless day of sick despair gone. Alone and dying---the most miserable creature on the wide earth. Oh, great God, who didst forgive Magdalene, have a little pity on me!"

A spasm of fierce anguish crossed her face for an instant, fading away, and leaving the hopeless despair more hopeless than before.

"I am mad, worse than mad, to hope as I do. She will never look upon my guilty face---she so pure, so stainless, so sweet---how dare I ask it? Oh, what happy women there are in the world! Wives who love and are beloved, and are faithful to the end! And I---think how I drag on living with all that makes life worth having gone forever, while those happy ones, whose lives are one blissful dream, are torn by death from all who love them. To think that I once had a husband, a child, a home; to think what I am now---to think of it, and not to go mad!"

She laid her face against the cold glass with a miserable groan. "Have pity on me, oh, Lord! and let me die!"

There was a rush of carriage-wheels without, a hansom cab whirled up to the door, and a tall young man leaped out. Two minutes more and the tall young man burst impetuously into the dark room.

"All alone, Mrs. Denver," called a cheery voice, "and all in the dark? Darkness isn't wholesome---too conducive to low spirits and the blue devils. Halloo! Jane Anne, idol of my young affections, bring up the gas."

He leaned over the greasy baluster, shouting into the invisible regions below, and was answered promptly enough by a grimy maid-servant with a flickering dip-candle.

"Tain't my fault, nor yet missis's," said this grimy maid. "Mrs. Denver will sit in the dark, which I've-----"

"That will do, Jane Anne," taking the dip and unceremoniously cutting her short. "Vamoose! evaporate! When I want you I'll sing out."

He re-entered the room and placed the candle on the table. The woman had risen, and stood with both hands clasped over her heart, a wild, gleaming, eager light in her black eyes. But she strove to restrain herself.

"I am glad to see you back, Mr. Parmalee," she said. "I have been expecting you for the last two days."

"And wearing yourself to skin and bone, as I knew you would, with your fidgets. What's the good of taking on so? I told you I'd come back as quick as I could, and I've done so. It ain't my fault that the time's been so long---it's Lady Kingsland's."

"You have seen her?"

"That I have. And very well worth seeing she is, I tell you. She's as handsome as a picture, though not so handsome as you must have been at her age, either, Mrs. Denver. And she says she'll see you."

"Oh, thank God!"

The woman tottered back and sunk into a chair.

"That's right," said Mr. Parmalee; "take a seat, and let us talk it all over at our ease."

He took one himself, not in the ordinary fashion, but with his face to the back, his arms crossed over it, and his long legs twisted scientifically round the bottom.

"I've seen him, and I've seen her," said the photographer, "and a finer-looking couple ain't from here to anywhere. And as the Lord made 'em, He matched 'em for an all-fired prouder pair you couldn't meet in a summer-day's walk."

"She comes of a proud race," the woman murmured, feebly. "The Hunsdens are of the best and oldest stock in England."

"And she's a thorough-bred, if ever there was a thorough-bred one yet, and blood will show in a woman as well as a horse. Yes, she's proud, she's handsome and dreadful cut up, I can tell you, at the news I brought her."

The woman covered her face with her hands with a low moan. Mr. Parmalee composedly went on:

"She knew your picture the minute she clapped eyes on it. I was afraid she might holler, as you wimmin do, at the sight, and her husband and another young woman were present, but she's got grit, that girl, the real sort. She turns round, by George! and gives me such a look---went through me like a carving-knife---and gets up without a word and walks away. And she never sent for me nor asked a question about it, although I mentioned you gave it to me, until I forced her to it, and after that no one need talk to me about the curiosity of the fair sex."

"Does her husband know?"

"No; and he's as jealous as a Turk. I wrote her a note---just a line---and sent it by that other young woman I spoke of, and what does he do but come to me like a roaring lion, and like to pummel my innards out! I owe him one for that, and I'll pay him off, too. I had to send again to my lady before she would condescend to see me, but when she did, I must say she behaved like a trump. She gave me thirty sovereigns plump down, promised me three hundred pounds, and told me to fetch you along. It ain't as much as I expected to make in this speculation; but, on the whole, I consider it a pretty tolerable fair stroke of business."

"Thank God!" the woman whispered, "thank God! I shall see my lost darling once before I die!"

"Now don't you go and take on, Mrs. Denver," observed Mr. Parmalee, "or you'll use yourself up, you know, and then you won't be able to travel to-morrow. And after to-morrow, and after you see your---- Well, my lady, there's the other little trip back to Uncle Sam's domains you've got to make; for you ain't a-going to stay in England and pester that poor young lady's life out?"

"No," said Mrs. Denver, mournfully---"no, I will never trouble her again. Only let me see her once more, and I will go back to my native land and wait until the merciful God sends me death."

"Oh, pooh!" said the artist; "don't you talk like that---it kind of makes my flesh creep, and there ain't no sense in it. There's Aunt Deborah, down to our section---you remind me of her---she was always going on so, wishing she was in heaven, or something horrid, the whole time. It's want of victuals more than anything else. You haven't had any dinner, I'll be bound!"

"No; I could not eat."

"Nor supper?"

"No: I never thought of it."

Mr. Parmalee got up, and was out of the room and hanging over the baluster in a twinkling.

"Here you, Jane Anne!"

Jane Anne appeared.

"Fetch up supper and look sharp---supper for two. Go 'round the corner and get us some oysters and a pint of port, and fetch up some baked potatoes and hot mutton chops---and quick about it."

"Now, then," said Mr. Parmalee, reappearing, "I've dispatched the slavery for provisions, and you've got to eat when they come. I won't have people living on one meal a day, and wishing they were in heaven, when I'm around."

"I will do whatever you think best, Mr. Parmalee," she said, humbly. "You have been very good to me."

"I know it," said Mr. Parmalee. "I always do the polite thing with your sex. My mother was a woman. She's down in Maine now, and can churn and milk eight cows, and do chores, and make squash pie. Oh! them squash pies of my old lady's require to be eat to be believed in; and, for her sake, I always take to elderly female parties in distress. Here's the forage. Come in, Jane Anne, beloved of my soul, and dump 'em down and go."

Jane Anne did.

"Now, Mrs. Denver, you sit right up and fall to. Here's oysters, and here's mutton chops, raging hot, and baked potatoes---delicious to look at. And here's a glass of port wine, and you've got to drink it without a whimper. Mind what I told you; you don't budge a step to-morrow unless you eat a hearty supper to-night."

"You are very good to me," Mrs. Denver repeated. "What would have become of me but for you?"

She strove to eat and drink to please him and to sustain her feeble strength, but every morsel seemed to choke her. She pushed away her plate at last and looked at him imploringly.

"I can not eat another mouthful. Indeed I would if I could. I have no appetite at all of late."

"That's plain to be seen. Well, if you can't, you can't, of course. And now, as it's past nine, the best thing you can do is to go to bed at once."

With the same humility she had evinced throughout, the woman obeyed at once. Mr. Parmalee, left alone, sat over his oysters and his port, luxuriating in the thirty sovereigns in the present and the three hundred pounds in the prospective.

"It's been an uncommon good investment," he reflected, "and knocks the photograph business into a cocked hat. Then there's Sybilla---she goes with the bargain, too. Three hundred pounds and a handsome, black-eyed wife. I wish she hadn't such a devil of a temper. I'll take her home to the farm, and if mother doesn't break her in she'll be the first she ever failed with."

Mr. Parmalee retired betimes, slept soundly, and was up in the gray day-dawn. Breakfast, piping hot, smoked on the table when Mrs. Denver appeared.

"Eat, drink and be merry," said Mr. Parmalee. "Go in and win. Try that under-done steak, and don't took quite so much like the ghost of Hamlet's father, if you can help it."

The woman tried with touching humility to please him, and did her best, but that best was a miserable failure.

A cab came for them in half an hour, and whirled them off on the first stage of their journey.

In the golden light of the spring afternoon Mr. Parmalee made his appearance again at the Blue Bell Inn, with a veiled lady, all in black, hanging on his arm.

"This here lady is my maiden aunt, come over from the State of Maine to see your British institutions," Mr. Parmalee said, in fluent fiction, to the obsequious landlady. "She's writing a book, and she'll mention the Blue Bell favorably in it. Her name is Miss Hepzekiah Parmalee. Let her have your best bedroom and all the luxuries this hotel affords, and I will foot the bill."

He lighted a cigar and sallied forth.

"Miss Hepzekiah Parmalee" dined alone in her own room; then sat by the window, with white face and strained eyes, waiting for Mr. Parmalee's return.

It was almost dark when he came. He entered hurriedly, flushed and excited.

"Fortune favors us this bout, Mrs. Denover," he said, "I've met an old chum down on the wharf yonder---a countryman---and I'd as soon have expected to find the President of the United States in this little one-horse town. His name's Davis---Captain Davis, of the schooner 'Angelina Dobbs'---and he's going to sail for Southampton this very night. There's a streak of luck. A free passage for you and for me up to Southampton to-night."

"But my---Lady Kingsland?" she faltered.

"I've made that all right, too. I met one of the flunkies and sent word to Sybilla that we were here, and that she'd better see us at once. I expect an answer every---- Ah, by George! speak of the---here she is!"

It was Miss Sybilla Silver, sailing gracefully down the street. Mr. Parmalee darted out and met her---superbly handsome, her dark cheeks flushed with some inward excitement, her black eyes gleaming with strange fire.

"Is she here?" she breathlessly asked.

Mr. Parmalee nodded toward the window.

Sybilla gazed up a moment at the pale, haggard face.

"They are alike," she said, under her breath---"mother and daughter---and that face is scarcely more haggard than the other now. We have had a dreadful quarrel, Mr. Parmalee, since you left, up at the Court."

"Want to know about me?"

"Partly. About the secret---about that meeting in the Beech Walk. He absolutely threatened her life."

"Should like to have been there to hear him," said Mr. Parmalee. "It would be paying off old scores a little. How did she take it?"

"She fainted. Her maid found her in a dead swoon next morning. She did not tell Sir Everard, by my advice; he would have been for making it up directly. They have not met since---my doing, too. He thinks she is sulking in her room. He is half mad to be reconciled---to make a fool of himself, asking pardon, and all that---but I have taken good care he shall not. He thinks she is obstinate and sullen; she thinks he is full of nothing but rage and revenge. It is laughable to manage them."

"Fun to you, but death to them," observed the artist. "You are flinty, Sybilla, and no mistake. I'm pretty hard myself, but I couldn't torment folks like that in cold blood. It's none of my business, however, and I don't care how high you pile the agony on him. Did you tell her the elderly party was here?"

"Yes. She has not left her room for three days. She is the shadow of her former self, and she was dreadfully agitated upon hearing it; but she answered, firmly, 'I will see her, and at once. I will meet her to-night.' I asked where, and then, for the first time, she was at a loss."

"The Beech Walk," suggested the artist.

"The Beech Walk is watched. Sir Everard's spies are on the lookout. No---I know a better place. The young plantation slopes down to the very water's edge; the shrubbery is thick and dense, the spot gloomy; no one ever goes there. You can come by water and fetch her in the boat. Land on the shore under the stone terrace, about midnight, and my lady will

meet you there."

"And you, Sybilla? The old lady and me, we sail at the turn of the tide for Southampton, to take passage for America. I suppose you hain't forgotten your promise?"

"Is it likely, George? I will follow you to America and we will be married there. It is impossible for me to go with you now. You can wait a couple of months, can you not?"

"But---"

"You must wait, George. I love you, and I will follow you and be your true and devoted wife. But you must wait a little. Say you agree, and let us part until we meet again---where? In New York?"

"I suppose so," Mr. Parmalee responded, gruffly. "You're boss in this business, it seems, and I've got to do as you say. But it's hard on a fellow; I calk'lated on taking you over with me."

"Would you have me go to you penniless? I will come to you with a fortune. Believe me, trust me, and wait. You will be on the stone terrace at twelve to-night?"

"She will," said the American. "I'll wait in the boat. 'Tain't likely they want me to be present at their interview. Just remind my lady to fetch along the three hundred pounds, and don't let her fail to come. I want to sail in the 'Angelina Dobbs' to-night."

"She will not fail. She will come."

Her eyes blazed up with a lurid fire as she said it.

"She will be there," she said, "and she shall fetch the three hundred pounds. Do you not fail!"

"I will not. Will you be there, too, Sybilla?"

"I? Of course not. There is no need of me."

"Then we say good-bye here?"

"Yes. Good-bye until we meet in New York."

"I will write to you from there," he said, wringing her hand. "Good-bye, Sybilla! I will be at the trysting-place to-night. Be sure the other party is, too."

"Without fail. Adieu, and---forever!"

She waved her hand and flitted away, uttering the last word under her breath.

Mr. Parmalee watched her out of sight, heaved a heavy sigh, and went back to the house.

Swiftly Sybilla Silver fluttered along in the chill evening wind, her face to the sunset sky. But not the pale luster of that February sunset lighted her dark face with that lurid light---the flame burned within. Two fierce red spots blazed on

either cheek: her eyes glowed like living coals; her hands were clinched under her shawl.

"She will be there," she whispered, under her breath---"she will be there, but she never will return. By the wrongs of the dead, by the vengeance I have sworn, this night shall be her last on earth. And he shall pay the penalty---my oath will be kept, the astrologer's prediction fulfilled, and Zenith the gypsy avenged!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"HAVE YOU PRAYED TO-NIGHT, DESDEMONA?"

The sun went down---a fierce and wrathful sunset. Black and brazen yellow flamed in the western sky; the sea lay glassy and breathless; the wind came in fitful gusts until the sun went down, and then died out in dead and ominous calm; night fell an hour before its time.

My lady sat by her chamber window, looking out at black sea and blacker sky. Exquisite pictures, wonderful bric-a-brac treasures, inlaid tables and cabinets, richest carpets and curtains, and chairs that were like ivory touched up with gold, made the room a miracle of beauty.

But my lady herself, sitting alone amid the rose-colored curtains, looking blankly out at the menacing sky, wore a face as dark as that sky itself. She had wasted to a shadow; dark circles under her hollow eyes told of sleepless nights and wretched days; her cheeks were haggard, her lips bloodless.

The white morning-dress she still wore clung loosely around her wasted figure; all the bright hair was pushed impatiently off her face and confined in a net.

No one who had seen Harrie Hunsden, radiant as Hebe, blooming as Venus, daring as Diana, at the memorable fox-hunt of a little more than a year ago, would ever have recognized this haggard, pallid, wretched-looking Lady Kingsland as the same.

She sat still and alone, gazing out at the dreary desolation of earth and heaven. The great house was still as a tomb; the bustle of the servants' regions was far removed, the gnawing of a mouse behind the black paneling, the soft ticking of the toy clock sounded unnaturally loud.

"Darkening," Harriet thought, looking at the leaden twilight---"darkening, like my life. Not two months a wife, and his love and trust gone forever. May Heaven pity me, for there is none on earth!"

There was a tap at the door. Lady Kingsland had learned to know that soft, light tap.

"Come in," she said; and Sybilla entered.

She did not pause at the closed door as usual; she glided noiselessly across the room and stood beside her. So like a ghost she came, her dead-black garments making no rustle, her footfall making no sound, her white face awfully corpse-like in the spectral light, her black eyes glowing like a cat's in the dark; my lady shrunk in absolute affright.

"Don't come any nearer!" she cried, putting out her hands. "What do you want?"

"I have seen Mr. Parmalee, my lady."

Her tones were the same as usual--respectful. But the gentle voice did not reassure Lady Kingsland.

"Well?" she said, coldly.

"He will be there, my lady. At half past eleven to-night you will find--your mother"---slowly and distinctly---"waiting for you on the terrace down by the shore."

"Half past eleven. Why so very late?"

"My lady, it will not be safe for you to venture out before. You are watched!"

"Watched!" she repeated, haughtily. "Do you mean, Sybilla Silver---"

"I mean, my lady," Miss Silver said, firmly, "Sir Everard has set spies. The Beech Walk is watched by night and by day. Claudine is little better than a tool in the hands of Edwards, the valet, with whom she is in love. She tells everything to Edwards, and Edwards repeats to his master. A quarter past eleven all will be still---the household will have retired---you may venture forth in safety. The night will be dark, the way lonely and dismal; but you know it every inch. On the stone terrace, at half past eleven, you will find--your mother awaiting you. You can talk to her in perfect safety, and for as long as you choose."

"Have you seen her?" she asked.

"At the window of the Blue Belt Inn---yes, my lady. It is very rash for her to expose herself, too, for hers is a face to strike attention at once, if only for the wreck of its beauty, and for its unutterable look of despair. But as she leaves again soon, I dare say nothing will come of it."

"When do they leave?"

"To-night. It appears a friend of Mr. Parmalee is captain of a little vessel down in the harbor, and he sails for Southampton at the turn of the tide---somewhere past midnight. It is a very convenient arrangement for all parties. By the by, Mr. Parmalee told me to remind you, my lady, of the three hundred pounds."

"Mr. Parmalee is impertinent. I need no reminder. Have you anything more to say, Miss Silver?"

"Only this, my lady: the servants' entrance on the south side of the house will be the safest way for you to take, and the nearest. If you dread the long, dark walk, my lady, I will be only too happy to accompany you."

"You are very good. I don't in the least dread it. When I wish you to accompany me anywhere I will say so."

Sybilla bowed, and the darkness hid a sinister smile.

"You have no orders for me, then, my lady?"

"None. Yes, you had better see Claudine, and say I shall not require her services to-night. Inform me when the servants have all retired, and"---a momentary hesitation, but still speaking proudly---"does Sir Everard dine at home this evening?"

"Sir Everard just rode off as I came in, my lady. He dines with Major Morrell and the officers, and will not return until past midnight, very likely. He is always late at those military dinners."

"That will do; you may go."

"Shall I not light the lamp, my lady?"

"No; be good enough to leave me."

Sybilla quitted the room, her white teeth, set together in a viperish clinch.

"How she hates me, and how resolved she is to show it! Very well, my lady. You don't hate me one thousandth part as much as I hate you; and yet my hatred of you is but a drop in the ocean compared to my deadly vengeance against your husband. Go, my haughty Lady Kingsland--go to your tryst--go to your death!"

Left alone, Harriet sat in the deepening darkness for over three hours, never moving--still and motionless as if turned to stone.

The pretty Swiss clock played a waltz preparatory to striking eleven. She sat and listened until the last musical chime died away; then she rose, groped her way to the low, marble chimney-piece, struck a lucifer, and lighted a large lamp.

The brilliant light flooded the room. Sybilla's rap came that same instant softly upon the door.

"My lady."

"I hear," my lady said, not opening it. "What is it?"

"All have retired; the house is as still as the grave. The south door is unfastened; the coast is clear."

"It is well. Good-night."

"Good-night."

She stood a moment listening to the soft rustle of Miss Silver's skirts in the passage, then, slowly and mechanically, she began to prepare for her night's work.

She took a long, shrouding mantle, wrapped it around her, drew the hood over her head, and exchanged her slippers for stout walking shoes. Then she unlocked her writing-case and drew forth a roll of bank-notes, thrust them into her bosom, and stood ready.

But she paused an instant yet. She stood before one of the full-length mirrors, looking at her spectral face, so hollow, so haggard, out of which all the youth and beauty seemed gone.

"And this is what one short month ago he called bright and beautiful--this wasted, sunken-eyed vision. Youth and beauty, love and trust and happiness, home and husband, all lost. Oh, my father, what have you done?"

She gave one dry, tearless sob. The clock struck the quarter past. The sound aroused her.

"My mother," she said---"let me think I go to meet my mother. Sinful, degraded, an outcast, but still my mother. Let me think of that, and be brave."

She opened her door; the stillness of death reigned. She glided down the corridor, down the sweeping stair-way, the soft carpeting muffling every tread---the dim night-lamps lighting her on her way.

No human sound startled her. All in the house were peacefully asleep---all save that flying figure, and one other wicked watcher. She gained the door in safety. It yielded to her touch. She opened it, and was out alone in the black, gusty night.

Harriet Kingsland's brave heart quailed only for a moment; then she plunged resolutely forward into the gloom. Slipping, stumbling, falling, rising again, the wind beating in her face, the branches catching like angry hands at her garments---still she hurried on. It was a long, long, tortuous path, but it came to an end. The roar of the sea sounded awfully loud as it rose in sullen majesty, the flags of the stone terrace rang under her feet. Panting, breathless, cold as death, she leaned against the iron railing, her hands pressed hard over her tumultuous heart.

It was light here. A fitful midnight moon, pale and feeble, was breaking through a rift in the clouds, and shedding its sickly glimmer over the black earth and raging sea. To her eyes, accustomed to the dense darkness, every object was plainly visible. She strained her gaze over the waves to catch the coming boat she knew was to bear those she had come to meet; she listened breathlessly to every sound. But for a weary while she listened, and watched, and waited in vain. What was that? A footstep crashing through the under-wood near at hand. She turned with a wordless cry of terror. A tall, dark figure emerged from the trees and strode straight toward her. An awful voice spoke:

"I swore by the Lord who made me I would murder you if you ever came again to meet that man. False wife, accursed traitress, meet your doom!"

She uttered a long, low cry. She recognized the voice---it was the voice of her husband; she recognized the form---her husband's---towering over her, with a long, gleaming dagger in his hand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE STONE TERRACE.

When Sybilla Silver parted from Lady Kingsland outside the chamber door, she went straight to her own room, and began her preparations for that night's work.

The flaming red spots, all foreign to her usual complexion, blazed on either cheek-bone; her black eyes shone like the eyes of a tigress crouched in a jungle.

But she never faltered---she never wavered in her deadly purpose. The aim of her whole life was to be fulfilled this night---the *manes* of her dead kinsfolk to be appeased.

Her first act was to sit down and write a note. It was very brief, illy spelled, vilely written, on a sheet of coarsest paper, and sealed with a big blotch of red wax and the impress of a grimy thumb. This is what Miss Silver wrote:

SUR HEVERARD KINGSLAND:

HONURED SIR:---This is to Say that my Lady is Promised the hamerican Gent, for to meet him this Night at Midnight on the Stone Terrace, Which honoured Sir you ought to Know, which is why I write.

Yours too Command, A FRIEND.

"This will do it, I think. Sir Everard will visit the stone terrace to-night before he sleeps. It will be fully eleven, probably half past, before he comes home. He will find this anonymous communication awaiting him. He will fume and stamp and spurn it, but he will go, all the same. And then!"

She sealed the note, directed it in the same atrocious fist to the baronet, and then, rising, proceeded to undress.

But not to go to bed. A large bundle lay on a chair; she opened it, drew forth a full suit of man's attire---an evening suit that the young baronet had worn but a few times, and the very counterpart of that which he wore to-night.

Miss Silver stood before the glass and arrayed herself in these. She was so tall that they fitted her very well, and when her long hair was scientifically twisted up, and a hat of Sir Everard's crushed down upon it, she was as handsome a young fellow as you could see in a long day's search.

That vague and shadowy resemblance to the baronet, which Mr. Parmalee had once noticed, was very palpable and really striking when she threw over all a long riding-cloak which Sir Everard often wore.

"You will do, I think," she said, to her transformed image in the glass. "Even my lady might mistake you for her husband in the uncertain moonlight."

She left the mirror, crossed the room, unlocked a trunk with a key she took out of her bosom, and drew forth a morocco scabbard case. The crest of the Kingslands and the monogram "E. K.," decorated the leather.

Opening this, she drew forth a long, glittering Spanish stiletto, not much thicker than a coarse needle, but strong and glittering and deadly keen.

"Sir Everard has not missed his pretty toy yet," she muttered. "If he had only dreamed, when he saw it first, not a fortnight ago, of the deed it would do this night!"

She closed the trunk, thrust the dagger into its scabbard, the scabbard into her bosom, blew out the lamp, and softly opened the door. All was still as the grave.

She locked her door securely, put the key in her pocket, and stole toward Sir Everard's rooms. Her kid slippers fell light as snow-flakes on the carpet. She opened the baronet's dressing-room door. It had been his sleeping-room, too, of late. His bed stood ready prepared; a lamp burned dimly on the dressing-table. Beside the lamp Miss Silver placed her anonymous letter, then retreated as noiselessly as she had entered, shut the door, and glided stealthily down the corridor, down the stairs, along the passages, and out of the same door which my lady had passed not ten minutes previously.

Swift as a snake, and more deadly of purpose, Sybilla glided along the gloomy avenues of the wood toward the sea-side terrace. Every nerve seemed strung like steel, every fiber of her body quivered to its utmost tension. Her eyes blazed in the dark like the eyes of a wild cat; she looked like a creature possessed of a devil.

She reached the extremity of the woodland path almost as soon as her victim. A moment she paused, glaring upon her with eyes of fiercest hate as she stood there alone and defenseless. The next, she drew out the flashing stiletto. Flung

away the scabbard, and advanced with it in her hand and horrible words upon her lips.

"I swore by the Lord who made me I would murder you if you ever came again to meet that man! False wife, accursed traitress, meet your doom!"

There was a wild shriek. In that fitful light she never doubted for a moment but that it was her husband.

"Have mercy!" she cried. "I am innocent, Everard! Oh, for God's sake, do not murder me!"

"Wretch---traitress---die. You are not fit to pollute the earth longer! Go to your grave with my hate and my curse!"

With a sudden paroxysm of mad fury the dagger was lifted---one fierce hand gripped Harriet's throat. A choking shriek---the dagger fell---a gurgling cry drowned in her throat---a fierce spurt of hot blood---a reel backward and a heavy fall over the low iron railing---down, down on the black shore beneath---and the pallid moonlight gleaming above shone on one figure standing on the stone terrace, alone, with a dagger dripping blood in its hand.

She leaned over the rail. Down below---far down---she could see a slender figure, with long hair blowing in the blast, lying awfully still on the sands. Not five feet off the great waves washed, rising, steadily rising. In five minutes more they would wash the feet of the terrace---that slender figure would lie there no more.

"The fall alone would have killed her. Before I am half-way back to the house those waves will be her shroud."

She wrapped her cloak around her and fled away---back, swift as the wind, into the house, up the stairs. Safe in her own room, she tore off her disguise. The cloak and the trousers were horribly spotted with blood. She made all into one compact package, rolled up the dagger in the bundle, stole back to the baronet's dressing-room and listened, and peeped through the key-hole. He was not there; the room was empty. She went in, thrust the bundle out of sight in the remotest corner of the wardrobe, and hastened back to her chamber. Her letter still lay where she had left it. The baronet had not yet returned.

In her own room Miss Silver secured the door upon the inside, according to custom, donned her night-dress, and went to bed---to watch and wait.

* * * * *

The mess dinner was a very tedious affair to one guest at least. Major Morrell and the officers told good stories and sung doubtful songs, and passed the wine and grew hilarious; but Sir Everard Kingsland chafed horribly under it all, and longed for the hour of his release.

A dull, aching torture lay at his heart; a chill presentiment of evil had been with him all day; the tortures of love and rage and jealousy had lashed him nearly into madness.

Sometimes love carried all before him, and he would start up to rush to the side of the wife he loved, to clasp her to his heart, and defy earth and Hades to part them. Sometimes anger held the day, and he would pace up and down like a madman, raging at her, at himself, at Parmalee, at all the world.

He was haggard and worn and wild, and his friends stared at him and shrugged their shoulders, and smiled significantly at this outward evidence of post-nuptial bliss.

It was almost midnight when the young baronet mounted Sir Galahad and rode home. Kingsland Court lay dark and still under the frowning night sky. He glanced up at the window of his wife's chamber. A light burned there. A longing, wistful look filled his blue eyes, his arms stretched out involuntarily, his heart gave a great plunge, as though it would break away and fly to its idol.

"My darling!" he murmured, passionately---"my darling, my life, my love, my wife! Oh, my God to think, I should love her, wildly, madly still, believing her---knowing her to be false!"

He went up to his dressing-room, his heart full to bursting. A mad, insane longing to go to her, to fold her to his breast, to forgive her all, to take her, guilty or innocent, and let pride and honor go to the winds, was upon him. He loved her so intensely, so passionately, that life without her, apart from her, was hourly increasing torture.

The sight of a folded note lying on the table alone arrested his excited steps. He took it up, looked at the strange superscription, tore it open, ran over its diabolical contents, and reeled as if struck a blow.

"Great Heaven! it is not true! it can not be true! it is a vile, accursed slander! My wife meet this man alone, and at midnight, in that forsaken spot! Oh, it is impossible! May curses light upon the slanderous coward who dared to write this infernal lie!"

He flung it, in a paroxysm of mad fury, into the fire. A flash of flame, and Sybilla Silver's artfully written note was forever gone. He started up in white fury.

"I will go to her room; I will see for myself! I will find her safely asleep, I know!"

But a horrible misgiving filled him, even while he uttered the brave words. He dashed out of his room and into his wife's. It was deserted. He entered the bedroom. She was not there; the bed had not been slept in. He passed to her boudoir; that, too, was vacant.

Sir Everard seized the bell-rope and rang a peal that resounded with unearthly echoes through the sleeping house. Five minutes of mad impatience---ten; then Claudine, scared and shivering, appeared.

"Where is your mistress?"

"*Mon Dieu!* how should I know? Is not my lady in bed?"

"No; her bed has not been slept in to-night. She is in none of her rooms. When did you see her last?"

"About ten o'clock. She dismissed me for the night; she said she would undress herself."

"Where is Miss Silver?"

"In bed, I think, monsieur."

"Go to her---tell her I want to see her at once. Lose no time."

Claudine disappeared. Miss Silver was so very soundly asleep that it required five minutes rapping to rouse her. Once aroused, however, she threw on a dressing-gown, thrust her feet into slippers, and appeared before the baronet, with a pale, anxious, inquiring face.

"Where is my wife? Where is Lady Kingsland?"

"Good Heaven! is she not here?"

"No. You know where she is! Tell me, I command you!"

Sybilla Silver covered her face with both hands, and cowered before him with every sign of guilt.

"Spare me!" she cried, faintly. "I dare not tell you!"

He made one stride forward, caught her by the arm, his eyes glaring like the eyes of a tiger.

"Speak!" he thundered; "or by the Heaven above us, I'll tear it from your throat! Is she with him?"

"She is," cowering, shrinking, trembling.

"Where?"

"On the stone terrace."

"How do you know?"

"He returned this afternoon; he sent for me; he told me to tell her to meet him there to-night, about midnight. She did not think you would return before two or three----- Oh, for pity's sake-----"

"I'll have their hearts' blood!" he thundered, with an awful oath.

The horrible voice, the horrible oath, was like nothing earthly. The two women cowered down, too intensely frightened even to scream. One other listener recoiled in wordless horror. It was Edwards, the valet.

The madman, goaded to insane fury, had rushed out of the hall---out of the house. The trio looked at each other with bloodless faces and dilated eyes of terror.

Edwards was the first to find his paralyzed tongue:

"May the Lord have mercy upon us! There'll be murder done this night!"

The two women never spoke. Huddled together, they clung to Edwards, as women do cling to men in their hour of fear.

Half an hour passed; they never moved nor stirred.

Ten minutes more, and Sir Everard dashed in among them as he had dashed out.

"It is false!" he shouted---"a false, devilish slander! She is not there!"

A shriek from Claudine---a wild, wild shriek. With starting eyes she was pointing to the baronet's hands.

All looked and echoed that horror-struck cry. They were literally dripping blood!

CHAPTER XXIX.

BRANDED.

The baronet lifted his hands to the light, and gazed at their crimson hue with wild, dilated eyes and ghastly face.

"Blood!" he said, in an awful whisper--"blood--Good God, it is hers! She is murdered!"

The three listeners recoiled still further, paralyzed at the sight, at the words, at the awful thought that a murderer, red-handed, stood before them.

"A horrible deed has been done this night!" he cried, in a voice that rang down the long hall like a bugle blast. "A murder has been committed! Rouse the house, fetch lights, and follow me!"

Edwards rose up, trembling in every limb.

"Quick!" his master thundered. "Is this a time to stand agape? Sybilla, sound the alarm! Let all rise and join in the search."

In a moment all was confusion. Claudine, of a highly excitable temperament, no sooner recovered from her stupor of dismay, then, with a piercing shriek, she fainted and tumbled over in a heap.

But no one heeded her. Bells rang, lights flashed, servants, white and wild, rushed to and fro, and over all the voice of the master rang, giving his orders.

"Lights, lights!" he shouted. "Men, why do you linger and stare? Lights! and follow me to the stone terrace."

He led the way. There was a general rush from the house. The men bore lanterns; the women clung to the men, terror and curiosity struggling, but curiosity getting the better of it. In dead silence all made their way to the stone terrace--all but one.

Sybilla Silver saw them depart, stood a moment, irresolute, then turned and sped away to Sir Everard's dressing-room. She drew the compact bundle of clothes from their corner, removed the dagger, tied up the bundle again with the weight inside, and hurriedly left the house.

"These blood-stained garments are not needed to fix the guilt upon him," she said to herself: "that is done already. The appearance of these would only create confusion and perplexity--perhaps help his cause. I'll destroy these and fling away the dagger in the wood. They'll be sure to find it in a day or two. They will make such a search that if a needle were lost it would be found."

There was an old sunken well, half filled with slimy, green water, mud, and filth, in a remote end of the plantation. Thither, unobserved, Sybilla made her way in the ghostly moonlight and flung her blood-stained bundle into its vile, poisonous depths.

"Lie there!" she muttered. "You have done your work, and I fling you away, as I fling away all my tools at my pleasure. There, in the green muck and slimy filth, you will tell no tales."

She hurried away and struck into a path leading to the stone terrace. She could see the lanterns flashing like firefly sparks; she could hear the clear voice of Sir Everard Kingsland commanding. All at once the lights were still, there was a deep exclamation in the baronet's voice, a wild chorus of feminine screams, then blank silence.

Sybilla Silver threw the dagger, with a quick, fierce gesture, into the wood, and sprung in among them with glistening, greedy black eyes. They stood in a semicircle, in horror-struck silence, on the terrace. The light of half a dozen lanterns streamed redly on the stone flooring, but redder than that lurid light, a great pool of blood lay gory before them. The iron railing, painted creamy white, was all clotted with jets of blood, and clinging to a projecting knob, something fluttered in the bleak blast, but they did not see it. All eyes were riveted on the awful sight before them---every tongue was paralyzed. Edwards, the valet, was the first to break the dreadful silence.

"My master!" he cried, shrilly; "he will fall!"

He dropped his lantern and sprung forward just in time and no more. The young baronet reeled and fell heavily backward. The sight of that blood---the life-blood of his bride---seemed to freeze the very heart in his body. With a low moan he lay in his servant's arms like a dead man.

"He has fainted," said the voice of Sybilla Silver. "Lift him up and carry him to the house."

"Wait!" cried some one. "What is this?"

He tore the fluttering garment off the projection and held it up to the light.

"My lady's Injy scarf!"

No one knew who spoke---all recognized it. It was a little Cashmere shawl Lady Kingsland often wore. Another thrilling silence followed; then---

"The Lord be merciful!" gasped a house-maid. "She's been murdered, and we in our beds!"

Sybilla Silver, leaning lightly against the railing, turned authoritatively to Edwards:

"Take your master to his room, Edwards. It is no use of lingering here now; we must wait until morning. Some awful deed has been done, but it may not be my lady murdered."

"How comes her shawl there, then?" asked the old butler. "Why can't she be found in the house?"

"I don't know. It is frightfully mysterious, but nothing more can be done to-night."

"Can't there?" said the butler. "Jackson and Fletcher will go to the village and get the police and search every inch of the park before daylight. The murderer can't be far away."

"Probably not, Mr. Norris. Do as you please about the police, only if you ever wish your master to recover from that death-like swoon, you will carry him at once to the house and apply restoratives."

She turned away with her loftiest air of hauteur, and Miss Silver had always been haughty to the servants. More than one dark glance followed her now.

"You're a hard one, you are, if there ever was a hard one!" said the butler. "There's been no luck in the house since you first set foot in it."

"She always hated my lady," chimed in a female. "It's my opinion she'll be more glad than sorry if she is made away with. She wanted Sir Everard for herself."

"Hold your tongue, Susan!" angrily cried Edwards. "You daren't call your soul your own if Miss Silver was listening. Bear a hand here, you fellers, and help me fetch Sir Heverard to the house."

They bore the insensible man to the house, to his room, where Edwards applied himself to his recovery. Sybilla aided him silently, skillfully. Meantime, the two gigantic footmen were galloping like mad to the village to rouse the stagnant authorities with their awful news. And the servants remained huddled together, whispering in affright; then, in a body, proceeded to search the house from attic to cellar.

"My lady may be somewhere in the house," somebody had suggested. "Who knows? Let us try."

So they tried, and utterly failed, of course.

Morning came at last. Dull and dreary it came, drenched in rain, the wind wailing desolately over the dark, complaining sea. All was confusion, not only at the Court, but throughout the whole village. The terrible news had flown like wild-fire, electrifying all. My lady was murdered! Who had done the deed?

Very early in the wet and dismal morning, Miss Silver, braving the elements, wended her way to the Blue Bell Inn.

Where was Mr. Parmalee? Gone, the landlady said, and gone for good, nobody knew where.

Sybilla stood and stared at her incredulously. Gone, and without a word to her---gone without seeing the murdered woman! What did it mean?

"Are you sure he has really gone?" she asked. "And how did he go?"

"Sure as sure!" was the landlady's response; "which he paid his bill to the last farthing, like a gentleman. And as for how he went, I am sure I can't say, not being took in his confidence; but the elderly party, she went with him, and it was late last evening."

Miss Silver was nonplused, perplexed, bewildered, and very anxious. What did Mr. Parmalee mean? Where had he gone? He might spoil all yet. She had come to see him, and accuse him of the murder---to frighten him, and make him fly the village. Circumstances were strongly against him---his knowledge of her secret; his nocturnal appointment; her disappearance. Sybilla did not doubt but that he would consider discretion the better part of valor, and fly.

She went back to the house, intensely perplexed. There the confusion was at its height. The scabbard had been found near the terrace, with the baronet's initials thereon.

Men looked into each other's blank faces, afraid to speak the frightful thoughts that filled their minds.

And in his room Sir Everard lay in a deep stupor---it was not sleep. Sybilla, upon the first faint signs of consciousness, had administered a powerful opiate.

"He must sleep," she said, resolutely, to Edwards. "It may save his life and his reason. He is utterly worn out, and every nerve in his body is strung to its utmost tension. Let him sleep, poor fellow!"

He lay before her so death-like, so ghastly, so haggard, that the stoniest enemy might have relented---the pallid shadow of the handsome, happy bridegroom of two short months ago.

"I have kept my oath," she thought. "I have wreaked the vengeance I have sworn. If I left him forever now, the *manes* of Zenith the gypsy might rest appeased. But the astrologer's prediction---ah! the work must go on to the appalling end."

Early in the afternoon arrived Lady Kingsland and Mildred, in a frightful state of excitement and horror. Harriet murdered! The tragic story had been whispered through The Grange until it reached their ears, thrilling them to the core of their hearts with terror.

Miss Silver met them---calm, grave, inscrutable.

"I am afraid it is true," she said, "awfully incredible as it seems. Sir Everard fainted stone-dead, my lady, at sight Of the blood upon the terrace."

"Great heavens! it is horrible! That unfortunate girl. And my son, Sybilla, where is he?"

"Asleep in his room, my lady. I administered an opiate. His very life, I think, depended on it. He will not awake for some hours. Do not disturb him. Will you come up to your old rooms and remove your things?"

They followed her. They had come to stay until the suspense was ended---to take care of the son and brother.

Lady Kingsland wrung her hands in a paroxysm of mortal anguish in the solitude of her own room.

"Oh, my God!" she cried, "have mercy and spare! My son, my son, my son! Would God I might die to save you from the worse horrors to come!"

All that day, all the next, and the next, and the next, the fruitless search for the murdered bride was made. All in vain; not the faintest trace was to be obtained.

Mr. Parmalee was searched for high and low. Immense rewards were offered for the slightest trace of him---immense rewards were offered for the body of the murdered woman. In vain, in vain!

Had the earth opened and swallowed them up, Mr. Parmalee and the baronet's lost bride could not more completely have vanished.

And, meanwhile, dark, ominous whispers rose and circulated from mouth to mouth, by whom originated no one knew. Sir Everard's frantic jealousy of Mr. Parmalee, his onslaught in the picture-gallery, the threats he had used again and again, overheard by so many, the oath he had sworn to take her life if she ever met the American artist again, his ominous conduct that night, his rushing like a madman to the place of tryst, his returning covered with blood---white, wild, like one insane. Then the finding of the scabbard, marked with his initials, and his own words:

"Blood! Good God! it is hers! She is murdered!"

The whispers rose and grew louder and louder; men looked in dark suspicion upon the young lord of Kingsland, and shrunk from him palpably. But as yet no one was found to openly accuse him.

Toward the close of the second week, a body was washed ashore, some miles down the coast, and the authorities there signified to the authorities of Worrel that the corpse might be the missing lady.

Sir Everard, his mother, and Miss Silver went at once. But the sight was too horrible to be twice looked at.

The height corresponded, and so did the long waves of flowing hair, and Sybilla Silver, the only one with nerve enough to glance again, pronounced it emphatically to be the body of Harriet, Lady Kingsland.

There was to be a verdict, and the trio remained; and before it commenced, the celebrated detective from Scotland Yard, employed from the first by Sir Everard, appeared upon the scene with crushing news. He held up a blood-stained dagger before the eye of the baronet:

"Do you know this little weapon, Sir Everard?"

Sir Everard looked at it and recognized it at once.

"It is mine," he replied. "I purchased it last year in Paris. My initials are upon it."

"So I see," was the dry response.

"How comes it here? Where did you find it?"

The detective eyed him narrowly, almost amazed at his coolness.

"I found it in a very queer place, Sir Everard---lodged in the branches of an elm-tree, not far from the stone terrace. It's a miracle it was ever found. I think this little weapon did the deed. I'll go and have a look at the body."

He went. Yes, there in the region of the heart was a gaping wound.

The inquest came on; the facts came out---mysteriously whispered before, spoken aloud now. And for the first time the truth dawned on the stunned baronet---he was suspected of the murder of the wife he loved!

The revolting atrocity, the unnatural horror of the charge, nerved him as nothing else could have done. His pale, proud face grew rigid as stone; his blue eyes flashed scornful defiance; his head reared itself haughtily aloft. How dare they accuse him of so monstrous a crime?

But the circumstantial evidence was crushing. Sybilla Silver's evidence alone would have damned him.

She gave it with evident reluctance; but give it she did with frightful force, and the bereaved young husband stood stunned at the terrible strength of the case she made out.

Everything told against him. His very eagerness to find the murderer seemed but throwing dust in their eyes. Not a doubt lingered in the minds of the coroner or his jury, and before sunset that day Sir Everard Kingsland was on his way to Worrel Jail to stand his trial at the coming assizes for the willful murder of Harriet, his wife.

CHAPTER XXX.

MISS SILVER ON OATH.

The day of trial came. Long, miserable weeks of waiting---weeks of anguish and remorse and despair had gone before, and Sir Everard Kingsland emerged from his cell to take his place in the criminal dock and be tried for his life for the greatest crime man can commit.

The court-house was crowded to suffocation---there was not even standing room. The long gallery was one living semicircle of eyes; ladies, in gleaming silks and fluttering plumes, thronged as to the opera, and slender throats were craned, and bright eyes glanced eagerly to catch one fleeting glimpse of the pale prisoner---a baronet who had murdered his bride before the honey-moon was well over.

The case was opened in a long and eloquent speech by the counsel for the crown, setting forth the enormity of the crime, citing a hundred incidents of the horrible and unnatural deeds jealousy had made men commit, from the days of the first murderer.

His address was listened to in profoundest silence. The charge he made out was a terribly strong one, and when he sat down and the first witness was called the hearts of Sir Everard Kingsland's friends sunk like lead.

He pleaded "Not guilty!" with an eye that flashed and a voice which rang, and a look in his pale, proud face that no murderer's face ever wore on this earth, and with those two words he had carried conviction to many a doubter.

"Call Sybilla Silver."

All in black---in trailing crape and sables, tall, stately, and dignified as a young duchess---Sybilla Silver obeyed the call.

She was deeply veiled at first, and when she threw back the heavy black veil, and the dark, bright, beautiful face looked full at judge and jury, a low murmur thrilled through the throng.

Those who saw her for the first time stared in wonder and admiration at the tall young woman in black, with the face and air of an Indian queen, and those to whom she was known thought that Miss Silver had never, since they saw her first, looked half as handsome as she did this day.

Her brilliant bloom of color was gone; she was interestingly pale, and her great black eyes were unnaturally deep and mournful.

"Your name is Sybilla Silver, and you reside at Kingsland Court. May we ask in what character---as friend or domestic?"

"As both. Sir Everard Kingsland has been my friend and benefactor from the first. I have been treated as a confidential friend both by him and his mother."

"By the deceased Lady Kingsland also, I conclude?"

"I was in the late Lady Kingsland's confidence---yes."

"You were the last who saw her alive on the night of March tenth---the night of the murder?"

"I was."

"Where did you part from her?"

"At her own chamber door. We bade each other good-night, and I retired to rest immediately."

"What hour was that?"

"About ten minutes before eleven."

"What communication were you making to Lady Kingsland at that hour?"

"I came to tell her the household had all retired---that she could quit the house unobserved whenever she chose."

"You knew, then, that she had an assignation for that night?"

"I did. It was I who brought her the message. She was to meet Mr. Parmalee at midnight, on the stone terrace."

"Who was this Mr. Parmalee?"

"An American gentleman---a traveling photographic artist, between whom and my lady a secret existed."

"A secret unknown to her husband?"

"Yes."

"And this secret was the cause of their mysterious midnight meeting?"

"It was. Mr. Parmalee dare not come to the house. Sir Everard had driven him forth with blows and abuse, and forbidden him to enter the grounds. My lady knew this, and was forced to meet him by stealth."

"Where was Sir Everard on this night?"

"At a military dinner given by Major Morrell, here in Worrel."

"What time did he return to Kingsland Court?"

"At half past eleven, as nearly as I can judge. I did not see him for some ten or fifteen minutes after; then Claudine, my lady's maid, came and aroused me---said Sir Everard was in my lady's dressing-room and wished to see me at once."

"You went?"

"I went immediately. I found Sir Everard in a state of passionate fury no words can describe. By some means he had learned of the assignation; through an anonymous note left upon his dressing-table, he said."

"Did you see this note?"

"I did not. He had none in his hand, nor have I seen any since."

"What did the prisoner say to you?"

"He asked me where was his wife---he insisted that I knew. He demanded an answer in such a way I dared not disobey."

"You told him?"

"I did. 'Is she with him?' he said, grasping my arm, and I answered, 'Yes.'"

"And then?"

"He asked me, 'Where?' and I told him; and he flung me from him, like a madman, and rushed out of the house, swearing, in an awful voice, 'I'll have their hearts' blood!'"

"Was it the first time you ever heard him threaten his wife's life?"

"No; the second. Once before I heard him say to her, at the close of a dreadful quarrel, 'If ever you meet that man again, I'll murder you, by the living Lord!'"

"What was the cause of the quarrel?"

"She had met Mr. Parmalee, by night and by stealth, in Sir Everard's absence, in the Beech Walk."

"And he discovered it?"

"He did. Edwards, his valet, had gone out with me to look for some article I had lost, and by chance we came upon them. We saw her give him money; we saw her dreadfully frightened; and when Edwards met his master again his face betrayed him---we had to tell him all."

"Did any one hear the prisoner use those words, 'I'll have their hearts' blood!' on the night of the murder, but yourself?"

"Yes; Edwards, his valet, and Claudine, the lady's maid. We crouched together in the hall, frightened almost to death."

"When did the prisoner reappear?"

"In little over half an hour. He rushed in in the same wild way he had rushed out---like a man gone mad."

"What did he say?"

"He shouted, 'It is false---a false, devilish slander! She is not there!'"

"Well---and then?"

"And then Claudine shrieked aloud and pointed to his hands. They were dripping with blood!"

"Did he attempt any explanation?"

"Not then. His first words were, as if he spoke in spite of himself: 'Blood! blood! Good God, it is hers! She is murdered!'"

"You say he offered no explanation then. Did he afterward?"

"I believe so. Not to me, but to others. He said his foot slipped on the stone terrace, and his hand splashed in a pool of something---his wife's blood."

"Can you relate what followed?"

"There was the wildest confusion. Claudine fainted. Sir Everard shouted for lights and men. 'There has been a horrible murder done,' he said. 'Fetch lights and follow me!' and then we all rushed to the stone terrace."

"And there you saw---what?"

"Nothing but blood. It was stained and clotted with blood everywhere; and so was the railing, as though a bleeding body had been cast over into the sea. On a projecting spike, as though torn off in the fall, we found my lady's India scarf."

"You think, then, he cast the body over after the deed was done?"

"I am morally certain he did. There was no other way of disposing of it. The tide was at flood, the current strong, and it was swept away at once."

"What was the prisoner's conduct on the terrace?"

"He fainted stone-dead before he was there five minutes. They had to carry him lifeless to the house."

"Was it not on that occasion the scabbard marked with his initials was discovered?"

"It was. One of the men picked it up. The dagger hidden in the elm-tree was found by the detective later."

"You recognized them both? You had seen them before in the possession of the prisoner?"

"Often. He brought the dagger from Paris. It used to lie on his dressing-table."

"Where he said he found the anonymous note?"

"Yes."

"Now Miss Silver," said the prosecuting attorney, "from what you said at the inquest and from what you have let drop to-day, I infer that my lady's secret was no secret to you. Am I right?"

There was a momentary hesitation---a rising: flush, a drooping of the brilliant eyes, then Miss Silver replied:

"Yes."

"How did you learn it?"

"Mr. Parmalee himself told me."

"You were Mr. Parmalee's intimate friend, then, it appears?"

"Y-e-e-s."

"Was he only a friend? He was a young man, and an unmarried one, as I am given to understand, and you, Miss Silver, are---pardon my boldness---a very handsome young lady."

Miss Silver's handsome face drooped lower. She made no reply.

"Answer, if you please," blandly insinuated the lawyer. "You have given your evidence hitherto with most unfeminine and admirable straightforwardness. Don't let us have a hitch now. Was this Mr. Parmalee a suitor of yours?"

"He was."

"An accepted one, I take it?"

"Y-e-e-s."

"And you know nothing now of his whereabouts? That is strange."

"It is strange, but no less true than strange. I have never seen or heard of Mr. Parmalee since the afternoon preceding that fatal night."

"How did you see him then?"

"He had been up to London for a couple of days on business connected with my lady; he had returned that afternoon with another person; he sent for me to inform my lady. I met and spoke to him on the street, just beyond the Blue Bell Inn."

"What had he to say to you?"

"Very little. He told me to tell my lady to meet him precisely at midnight, on the stone terrace. Before midnight the murder was done. What became of him, why he did not keep his appointment, I do not know. He left the inn very late, paid his score, and has never been seen or heard of since.

"Had he any interest in Lady Kingsland's death?"

"On the contrary, all his interest lay in her remaining alive. While she lived, he held a secret which she intended to pay him well to keep. Her death blights all his pecuniary prospects, and Mr. Parmalee loved money."

"Miss Silver, who was the female who accompanied Mr. Parmalee from London, and who quitted the Blue Bell Inn with him late on the night of the tenth?"

Again Sybilla hesitated, looked down, and seemed confused.

"It is not necessary, is it?" said she, pleadingly. "I had rather not tell. It---it is connected with the secret, and I am bound by a promise-----"

"Which I think we must persuade you to break," interrupted the debonair attorney. "I think this secret will throw a light on the matter, and we must have it. Extreme cases require extreme measures, my dear young lady. Throw aside your honorable scruples, break your promise, and tell us this secret which has caused a murder."

Sybilla Silver looked from judge to jury, from counsel to counsel, and clasped her hands.

"Don't ask me!" she cried---"oh, pray, don't ask me to tell this!"

"But we must---it is essential---we must have it, Miss Silver. Come, take courage. It can do no harm now, you know---the poor lady is dead. And first---to plunge into the heart of it at once---tell us who was the mysterious lady with Mr. Parmalee?"

The hour of Sybilla's triumph had come. She lifted her black eyes, glittering with livid flame, and shot a quick, sidelong glance at the prisoner. Awfully white, awfully calm, he sat like a man of stone, awaiting to hear what would cost him his life.

"Who was she?" the lawyer repeated.

Sybilla turned toward him and answered, in a voice plainly audible the length and breadth of the, long room:

"She called herself Mrs. Denover. Mr. Parmalee called her his sister. Both were false. She was Captain Harold Hunsden's divorced wife, Lady Kingsland's mother, and a lost, degraded outcast!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

FOUND GUILTY.

There was the silence of death. Men looked blankly in each other's faces, then at the prisoner. With an awfully corpse-like face, and wild, dilated eyes, he sat staring at the witness---struck dumb.

The silence was broken by the lawyer.

"This is a very extraordinary statement, Miss Silver," he said. "Are you quite certain of its truth? It is an understood thing that the late Captain Hunsden was a widower."

"He was nothing of the sort. It suited his purpose to be thought so. Captain Hunsden was a very proud man. It is scarcely likely he would announce his bitter shame to the world."

"And his daughter was cognizant of these facts?"

"Only from the night of her father's death. On that night he revealed to her the truth, under a solemn oath of secrecy. Previous to that she had believed her mother dead. That death-bed oath was the cause of all the trouble between Sir Everard and his wife. Lady Kingsland would have died rather than break it."

She glanced again---swift, keen, sidelong, a glance of diabolical triumph---at the prisoner. But he did not see it, he only heard the words---the words that seemed burning to the core of his heart.

This, then, was the secret, and the wife he had loved and doubted and scorned had been true to him as truth itself; and now he knew her worth and purity and high honor when it was too late.

"How came Mr. Parmalee to be possessed of the secret? Was he a relative?"

"No. He learned the story by the merest accident. He left New York for England in his professional capacity as photographic artist, on speculation. On board the steamer was a woman---a steerage passenger---poor, ill, friendless, and alone. He had a kindly heart, it appears, under his passion for money-making, and when this woman---this Mrs. Denver---fell ill, he nursed her as a son might. One night, when she thought herself dying, she called him to her bedside and told him her story."

Clear and sweet Sybilla Silver's voice rang from end to end, each word cutting mercilessly through the unhappy prisoner's very soul.

"Her maiden name had been Maria Denver, and she was a native of New York City. At the age of eighteen an English officer met her while on a visit to Niagara, fell desperately in love with her, and married her out of hand.

"Even at that early age she was utterly lost and abandoned; and she only married Captain Hunsden in a fit of mad desperation and rage because John Thorndyke, her lover, scornfully refused to make her his wife.

"Captain Hunsden took her with him to Gibraltar, where his regiment was stationed, serenely unconscious of his terrible disgrace. One year after a daughter was born, but neither husband nor child could win this woman from the man she passionately loved.

"She urged her husband to take her back to New York to see her friends; she pleaded with a vehemence he could not resist, and in an evil hour he obeyed.

"Again she met her lover. Three weeks after the wronged husband and all the world knew the revolting story of her degradation. She had fled with Thorndyke."

Sybilla paused to let her words take effect. Then she slowly went on:

"There was a divorce, of course; the matter was hushed up as much as possible; Captain Hunsden went back to his regiment a broken-hearted man.

"Two years after he sailed for England, but not to remain. How he wandered over the world, his daughter accompanying him, from that time until he returned to Hunsden Hall, every one knows. But during all that time he never heard one word of or from his lost wife.

"She remained with Thorndyke---half starved, brutally beaten, horribly ill-used---taunted from the first by him, and hated at the last. But she clung to him through all, as women do cling; she had given up the whole world for his sake; she must bear his abuse to the end. And she did, heroically.

"He died---stabbed in a drunken brawl---died with her kneeling by his side, and his last word an oath. He died and was buried, and she was alone in the world as miserable a woman as the wide earth ever held.

"One wish alone was strong within her---to look again upon her child before she died. She had no wish to speak to her, to reveal herself, only to look once more upon her face, then lie down by the road-side and die.

"She knew she was married and living here; Thorndyke had maliciously kept her *au fait* of her husband and child. She sold all she possessed but the rags upon her back, and took a steerage passage for England.

"That was the story she told Mr. Parmalee. 'You will go to Devonshire,' she said to him; 'you will see my child. Tell her I died humbly praying her forgiveness. She is rich; she will reward you.'

"Mr. Parmalee immediately made up his mind that this sick woman, who had a daughter the wife of a wealthy baronet, was a great deal too valuable, in a pecuniary light, to be allowed 'to go off the hooks,' as he expressed it, thus easily.

"He pooh-poohed the notion of her dying, cheered her up, nursed her assiduously, and finally brought her around. He left her in London, posted down here, and remained here until the return of Sir Everard and my lady from their honey-moon trip. The day after he presented himself to them---displayed his pictures, and among others showed my lady her mother's portrait, taken at the time of her marriage. She recognized it at once---her father had left her its counterpart on the night he died. He knew her secret, and she had to meet him if he chose. He threatened to tell Sir Everard else, and the thought of her husband ever discovering her mother's shame was agony to her. She knew how proud he was, how proud his mother was, and she would have died to save him pain. And that is why she met Mr. Parmalee by night and by stealth---why she gave him money---why all the horrors that have followed occurred."

Once more the cruel, clear, unfaltering voice paused. A groan broke the silence---a groan of such unutterable anguish and despair from the tortured husband that every heart thrilled to hear it.

With that agonized groan, his face dropped in his hands, and he never raised it again. He heard no more---he sat bowed, paralyzed, crushed with misery and remorse. His wife---his lost wife---had been as pure and stainless as the angels, and he---oh, pitiful God! how merciless he had been!

Sybilla Silver was dismissed; other witnesses were called. Edwards and Claudine were the only ones examined that day, Sybilla had occupied the court so long. They corroborated all she had said. The prisoner was remanded, and the court adjourned.

The night of agony which followed to the wretched prisoner no words can ever tell. All he had suffered hitherto seemed as nothing. Men recoiled in horror at the sight of him next day; it was as if a galvanized corpse had entered the court-room.

He sat in dumb misery, neither heeding nor hearing. Only once was his attention dimly aroused. It was at the evidence of a boy---a ragged youth of some fifteen years, who gave his name as Bob Dawson.

"He had been out late on that 'ere night. It was between ten and eleven that he was a-dodgin' round near the stone terrace. Then he sees a lady a-waitin', which the moon was shining on her face, and he knowed my lady herself. He dodged more than hever at the sight, and peeked round a tree. Just then came along a tall gent in a cloak, like Sir Everard wears, and my lady screeches out at sight of him. Sir Everard, he spoke in a deep, 'orrid voice, and the words were so hawful, he---Bob Dawson---remembered them from that day to this.

"'I swore by the Lord who made me I would murder you if you ever met that man again. False wife, accursed traitress, meet your doom!'

"And then my lady screeches out again and says to him---she says:

"'Have mercy! I am innocent, Heverard! Oh, for God's sake, do not murder me!'

"And Sir Heverard, he says, fierce and 'orrid:

"Wretch, die! You are not fit to pollute the hearth! Go to your grave with my 'ate and my cuss!"

"And then," cried Bob Dawson, trembling all over as he told it, "I see him lift that there knife, gentlemen, and stab her with all his might, and she fell back with a sort of groan, and he lifts her up and pitches of her over hinto the sea. And then he cuts, he does, and I--I was frightened most hawful, and I cut, too."

"Why did you not tell this before?" the judge asked.

"Cos I was scared--I was," Bob replied, in tears. "I didn't know but that they might took and hang me for seeing it. I told mammy the other night, and mammy she came and told the gent there," pointing one finger at the counsel for the crown, "and he said I must come and tell it here; and that's all I've got to tell, and I'm werry sorry as hever I seed it, and it's all true, s'help me!"

Sybilla Silver's eyes fairly blazed with triumphant fire. Her master, the arch-fiend, seemed visibly coming to her aid; and the most miserable baronet pressed his hand to his throbbing head.

There was the summing up of the evidence---one damning mass against the prisoner. There was the judge's charge to the jury. Sir Everard heard no words---saw nothing. He fell into a stunned stupor that was indeed like madness.

The jury retired---vaguely he saw them go. They returned. Was it minutes or hours they had been gone? His dulled eyes looked at them expressionless.

"How say you, gentlemen of the jury---guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!"

Amid dead silence the word fell. Every heart thrilled with awe but one. The condemned man sat staring at them with an awful, dull, glazed stare.

The judge arose and put on his black cap, his face white, his lips trembling.

Only the last words seemed to strike him---to crash into his whirling brain with a noise like thunder.

"And that there you be hanged by the neck until dead, and may the Lord have mercy upon your soul!"

He sat down. The awful silence was something indescribable. One or two women in the gallery fainted, then the hush was broken in a blood-curdling manner.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SYBILLA'S TRIUMPH.

It was the night before the execution. In his feebly lighted cell the condemned man sat alone, trying to read by the palely glimmering lamp. The New Testament lay open before him, and on this, the last night of his life, he was reading the story of Gethsemane and Calvary. On this last night heart and soul were at rest, and an infinite calm illumined every feature.

Weeks had passed since the day when sentence of death had been pronounced upon him, and the condemned man had lain burning in the wild delirium of brain fever.

Sybilla Silver had been his most sleepless, his most devoted attendant. Her evidence had wrung his heart---had condemned him to the most shameful death man can die; but she had only told the truth, and truth is mighty and will prevail. So she came and nursed him now, forgetting to eat or sleep in her zeal and devotion, and finally wooed him back to life and reason, while those who loved him best prayed God, by night and by day, that he might die.

But, while hovering in the "Valley of the Shadow," death had lost all its terror for him---he rose a changed man.

"And she is there," he said, with his eyes fixed dreamily on the one patch of blue May sky he could see between his prison bars---"my wronged, my murdered, my beloved wife! Ah, yes, death is the highest boon the judges of this world can give me now!"

And so the last night came. He sat alone. The jailer who was to share his cell on this last, awful vigil had been bribed to leave him by himself until the latest moment.

"Come in before midnight," he said, smiling slightly, "and guard me while I sleep, if you wish. Until then, I should like to be left quite alone."

And the man obeyed, awed unutterably by the sublime look of that marble face.

"He never did it," he said to his wife. "No murderer ever looked with such clear eyes and such a sweet smile as that. Sir Everard Kingsland is as innocent as a hangel, and there'll be a legal murder done to-morrow. I wish it was that she-devil that swore his life away instead, I'd turn her off myself with the greatest pleasure."

As if his thoughts had evoked her, a tall dark figure stood before him---Miss Sybilla Silver herself.

"Good Lord!" cried the jailer, aghast; "who'd a-thought it? What do you want?"

"To see the prisoner," responded Sybilla.

"You can't see him, then," said the jailer, gruffly. "He ain't going to see anybody this last night, ma'am."

"Mr. Markham"---she came over and laid her velvet paw on his arm, and magnetized him with her big black eyes---"think better of it. It is his last night. His mother lies on the point of death. I come here with a last sacred message from a dying mother to a dying son. You have an aged mother yourself, Mr. Markham. Ah! think again, and don't be hard upon us."

A sovereign slipped into his palm.

"For only half an hour, then," he said; "mind that. Come along!"

The key clanked; the door swung back. The pale prisoner lifted his serene eyes; the tall, dark figure stepped in.

"Sybilla!"

"Yes, Sir Everard."

The great door closed with a bang.

"Half an hour, mind," reiterated the jailer.

The key turned; they were alone together within those massive walls.

"I thought we parted yesterday for the last time in this lower world," said the baronet, calmly.

"Did you? You were mistaken, then. We meet again and part again forever to-night, for the last time in this lower world, or that upper one either, in which you believe, and which I know to be a very pretty little fable."

She laughed a low, derisive laugh, and came up close to him. He shut his book, and looked at her in wonder.

"What do you mean? Why have you come hither to-night? Why do you look like that? What is it all?"

"It is this! That the mask worn two long years is about to be torn off. It means that you are to hear the truth; it means that the purpose of my life is fulfilled; it means that the hour of my triumph has come."

He sat and looked at her, lost in wonder.

"You do not speak---you sit and stare as though you could not believe your eyes or ears. It is hard to believe, I know---the humble, the meek Sybilla metamorphosed thus. But the Sybilla Silver you knew was a delusion. Behold the real one, for the first time in your life!"

"Woman, who are you? What are you?"

"I am the granddaughter of Zenith the gypsy, the woman your father wronged to the death, and your bitterest enemy, Sir Everard Kingsland!"

"The granddaughter of Zenith the gypsy?" he repeated. "Then Sybilla Silver is not your name?"

"The name is as false as the character in which she showed herself---that of your friend."

"And yet, the first time we met you saved my life."

"No thanks for that. I did not know you, though if I had I would have saved it, all the same. That was not the death you were to die. I saved you for the gallows."

"Sybilla, Sybilla!"

"I saved you for the gallows!" she repeated. "I come here to-night to tell you the truth, and you shall hear it. Did I not swear your life away? Did I not nurse you back from the jaws of death? All for what? That the astrologer's prediction might be fulfilled---that the heir of Kingsland Court might die a felon's death on the scaffold!"

"The astrologer's prediction?" he cried, catching some of her excitement. "What do you know about that?"

"Everything---everything!" she exclaimed, exultingly. "Far more than you do, for you only know such a thing exists---you know nothing of its contents. Oh, no! mamma guarded her darling boy too carefully for that,

notwithstanding your dying father's command. But in spite of her it has come true."

"What was the astrologer's prediction---that terrible prediction that shortened my father's life?"

"It was this---that his only son and heir, born on that night, would die by the hand of the common hangman, a murderer's death on the scaffold. Enough to blight any father's life who believed in it, was it not?"

"It was devilish. My poor father! Tell me the name of the fiend incarnate who could do so diabolical a deed, for you know?"

"I do. That man was my father."

"Your father?"

"Ay, Achmet the Astrologer. Ha! ha! As much an astrologer as you or I. It was his part of our vengeance---my part was to see it carried out. I swore, by my dying mother's bedside, to devote my life to that purpose. Have I not kept my oath?"

She folded her arms and looked at him with a face of devilish malignity. He recoiled from her as from a visible demon.

"For God's sake, go! You bring a breath of hell into this prison. Go---go! You have done your master's work. Leave me!"

"Not yet; you have heard but half the truth. Oh, potent Prince of Kingsland, hear me out! You will be hanged tomorrow morning for murdering your wife! You didn't murder her, did you? Who do you suppose did it?"

He rose to his feet, staggered back against the wall, his eyes starting from their sockets.

"Great God!"

"Ah, you anticipate, I see. Yes, my lord of Kingsland, I murdered your pretty little wife! Keep off! I have a pistol here, and I'll blow your brains out if you come one step nearer---if you utter a word! I don't want to cheat Jack Ketch, if I can. And it is no use your crying for help---there is no one to hear, and these stone walls are thick. Stand there, my rich, my noble, my princely brother, and listen to the truth."

He stood, holding by the wall, paralyzed with horror.

"Yes, I murdered her!" Sybilla reiterated, with sneering triumph. "Disguised in your clothes, using your dagger; and she died, believing it to be you. All I told, and all the boy Dawson told at the trial was true as the Heaven you believe in. Your wife was true as truth, pure as the angels. She loved only you---she loved you with her whole heart and soul. Her vow by the bedside of her dying father chained her tongue. To save you the shame, the humiliation of learning the truth about her degraded mother, she met in secret this Mr. Parmalee. On that night she went to the stone terrace to see her mother, for the first, the last, the only time. I arranged it all---I lured her there---I stabbed her, and flung her over into the sea! I hated her for your sake---I hated her for her own. And to-morrow, for my crime, you will die!"

And still he gazed, paralyzed, stunned, speechless.

"Poor fool!" she said, with unutterable scorn---"poor, blind, besotted fool! and this is the end of all! Young, handsome, rich, high-born, surrounded by friends, the wealthy and the great, one woman's work brings you to this! I have said my

say, and now I leave you; here we part, Sir Everard Kingsland. Call the jailer; tell him what I have told you---tell it through the length and breadth of the land, if you choose. Not one will believe you. It is an utterly mad and impossible tale. I have only to calmly and scornfully deny it. And to-morrow, when the glorious sun rises I will be far away. In Spain, the land of my mother and my grandmother, I go to join our race---to become a dweller in tents---a gypsy, free as the wind that blows. The gold your lavish hand has given me will make me and my tribe rich for life. I go to be their queen. Farewell, Sir Everard Kingsland. My half hour has expired; the jailer comes to let me out. But first I go straight from here to Kingsland Court, to tell your mother what I have just told you---to tell her her idolized son dies for my crime, and to kill her, if I can, with the news."

The door swung open---Miss Silver flitted out. It broke the spell. The prisoner started forward, tried hoarsely, vainly to speak. Enfeebled by long illness, by repeated shocks, he staggered a pace or two and fell face forward at the jailer's feet like a log.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

And while Sir Everard Kingsland lay in his felon's cell, doomed to die, where was she for whose murder he was to give his life? Really murdered?

Harriet---Lady Kingsland---was not dead. Hundreds of miles of sea and land rolled between her and Kingsland Court, and in a stately New York mansion she looked out at the sparkling April sunshine, with life and health beating strong in her breast.

Mr. George Washington Parmalee had saved her life. On that tragic night of March tenth, he had quitted the Blue Bell with Mrs. Denver, and descended at once to the shore, where a boat from the "Angelina Dobbs" was awaiting them.

Mr. Parmalee took the oars and rowed away in the direction of the park. The sickly glimmer of the moon showed him the stone terrace and the solitary figure standing waiting there. But the noise of the wash on the beach and the sighing of the trees prevented Harriet from hearing the dip of the sculls. On the sea the night was so dark that the boat glided along unseen.

He had neared the spot and rowed softly along under the deep shadow of overhanging trees, when he espied a second figure, muffled in a cloak, emerge and confront the lady. He recognized, or thought he recognized, the baronet, and came to a deadlock, with a stifled imprecation.

"It's all up with them three hundred pounds this bout," he thought; "confound the luck!"

He could not hear the words---the distance was too great---but he could see them plainly. The wild shriek of Lady Kingsland would have been echoed by her terrified mother had not the artist clapped his hand firmly over her mouth.

"Damnation! Dry up, can't you? Oh, good God!"

He started up in horror, nearly upsetting the boat. He had seen the fatal blow given, he saw the body hurled over the railing, and he saw the face of the murderer!

A flash of moonlight shone full upon it bending down, and he recognized, in men's clothes, the woman who was to be his wife.

The assassin fled. As she vanished G. W. Parmalee looked up with a hollow groan, remained irresolute for an instant, shook himself, and took up the oars.

"We must pick up the body," he said, in an unearthly voice. "The waves will wash it away in five minutes."

He rowed ashore, lifted the lifeless form, carried it into the boat, and laid it across the mother's knee.

"We'll put for the 'Angelina,'" he observed. "If there's any life left, we'll fetch her to there."

"Her heart beats," said Mrs. Denver, raining tears and kisses on the cold face. "Oh, my child, my child! it is your wretched mother who has done this!"

They reached the "Angelina Dobbs," where they were impatiently waited for, and captain and crew stared aghast at sight of the supposed corpse.

"Do you take the 'Angelina Dobbs' for a cemetery, Mr. Parmalee?" demanded Captain Dobbs, with asperity. "Who's that air corpse?"

"Come into the cabin and I'll tell you."

There he heard, in wonder and pity, the story.

"Poor creeter! Pretty as a picter, too! Who did the deed?"

"It looked like her husband," replied Mr. Parmalee. "He was as jealous as a Turk, anyway."

"She is not dead!" exclaimed Mrs. Denver; "her heart flutters. Oh! pray leave me alone with her; I think I know what to do."

The men quitted the cabin. Mrs. Denver removed her daughter's clothing and examined the wound. It was deep and dangerous looking, but not necessarily fatal---she knew that, and she had had considerable experience during her rough life with John Thorndyke. She stanchd the flow of blood, bathed and dressed the wound, and finally the dark eyes opened and looked vaguely in her face.

"Who are you? Where am I?" very feebly.

"I am your nurse," she said, tremulously, "and you are with friends who love you."

"Ah! I remember." A look of intense anguish crossed her face. "You are my mother!"

"Your most wretched mother! Oh, my darling, I am not worthy to look in your face!"

"You are all that is left to me now---ah, Heaven pity me!--since he thinks me guilty. I remember all. He tried to murder me; he called me a name I will never forget. Mother, how came I here? Is this a ship?"

Very gently, softly, soothingly the mother told how Mr. Parmalee had saved her life.

"And where are we going now?"

"To Southampton, I think. But we will return if you wish it."

"To the man who tried to take my life? Ah, no, mother! Never again in this world to him! Call Mr. Parmalee."

"My dear, you must not talk so much; you are not able."

"Call Mr. Parmalee."

Mrs. Denover obeyed.

The artist presented himself promptly, quite overjoyed.

"Why, now," said Mr. Parmalee, "I'd rather see this than have a thousand dollars down. Why, you look as spry almost as ever. How do you feel?"

"You have been very good to me and my mother. Be good until the end. If I die, bury me where he will never hear of my death nor look upon my grave. If I live, take me back to New York---I have friends there---and don't let him know whether I am living or dead."

"I'll do it! It's a go! I owe him one for that kicking, and, by Jove! here's a chance to pay him. Jest you keep up heart and get well, and we'll take you to New York in the 'Angelina Dobbs,' and nobody be the wiser."

Mr. Parmalee kept his word. They lay aboard the vessel while loading at Southampton, and a surgeon was in daily attendance upon the sick girl.

"You fetch her round," said Mr. Parmalee. "She's the skipper's only daughter---this 'ere craft, the 'Angelina Dobbs,' is named after her---and he'll foot the bill like a lud."

The surgeon did his best, and was liberally paid out of the three hundred pounds which Mrs. Denover had found in the bosom of Harriet's dress. But for days and weeks she lay very ill---ill unto death---delirious, senseless. Then the fever yielded, and death-like weakness ensued.

This, too, passed; and by the time the "Angelina" reached New York, the poor girl was able to saunter up and down the deck, and drink in the life-giving sea air.

Thus, while fruitless search was being made for G. W. Parmalee throughout London---while detectives examined every passenger who sailed in the emigrant ships---he was safely skimming the Atlantic in Captain Dobb's cockleshell.

To do him justice, he never thought---and no more did Harriet---of what might follow her disappearance. The baronet would leave the country, they both imagined, and her fate would remain forever a mystery.

So the supposed dead bride reached New York in safety, and that body washed ashore and identified by Sybilla Silver, to suit her own ends, was some nameless unfortunate.

On the pier in New York Mr. Parmalee and Lady Kingsland parted.

"I am going to my uncle's house," she said; "my mother's brother. Hugh Denover is a rich merchant, and will receive us, I know. Keep my story secret, and come and see me next time you visit New York. Here is my uncle's address; give me

yours, and if ever it is in my power, I will not forget how nobly you have acted and how inadequately you have been repaid."

They shook hands and parted.

Mr. Parmalee went "down East," not at all satisfied with his little English speculation. He had lost a handsome reward and a handsomer wife. He dared hardly think to himself that Sybilla had done the horrid deed, and he had never breathed his suspicion to Harriet.

"Let her think it's the baronet, if she's a mind to. I ain't a-going to do him a good turn. But I know better."

Harriet and her mother sought out Mr. Denover. He lived in a stately up-town mansion, with his wife and one son, and received both poor waifs with open arms. His lost sister had been his boyhood's pet; he had nothing for her now but pity and forgiveness, when she looked at him with death in her face.

"My poor Maria, don't talk of the wretched past. I love my only sister in spite of all, and neither she nor her child shall want a home while I have one."

Harriet told her story very briefly. Her father had been dead for two years. She had married; she had not lived happily with her husband, and they had parted. She had come to Uncle Hugh; she knew he would give his sister's daughter a home.

She told her story with dry eyes and unfaltering voice; but Mr. Denover, looking in that pale, rigid young face, read more of her despair than she dreamed.

"Her husband has been some English grandee, like Captain Hunsden, I dare say," he thought, "proud as Lucifer, and when he discovered that about her mother, despised and ill-treated her."

The penitent wife of Captain Hunsden did not long survive to enjoy her new home. Two weeks after their arrival she lay upon her death-bed. Nothing could save her. She had been doomed for months---life gave way when the excitement that had buoyed her up was gone.

By night and day Harriet watched by her bedside, and the repentant Magdalen's last hours were the most blessed she had ever known.

"I do not deserve to die like this," she said. "Oh, my darling, your love makes my death-bed very sweet!"

They laid her in Greenwood, and once more Harriet's desolation seemed renewed.

"I am doomed to lose all I love," she thought, despairingly---"father, husband, mother---all!"

She drooped day by day, despite the tenderest care. No smile ever lighted her pale face, no happy light ever shone from the mournful dark eyes.

"Her heart is broken," said Uncle Hugh; "she will die by inches before our very eyes!"

And Uncle Hugh's prediction might have been fulfilled had not a new excitement arisen to stimulate her to renewed life and send her back to England.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. PARMALEE TURNS UP TRUMPS.

Mr. G. W. Parmalee went down to Dobbsville, Maine, and reposed again in the bosom of his family. He went to work on the paternal acres for awhile, gave that up in disgust, set up once more a picture-gallery, and took the portraits of the ladies and gentlemen of Dobbsville at fifty cents a head.

Mr. Parmalee was fast becoming a misanthrope. His speculation had failed, his love was lost; nothing lay before him but a long and dreary existence spent in immortalizing in tin-types the belles and beaux of Dobbsville.

Sometimes a fit of penitence overtook him when his thoughts reverted to the desolate young creature, worse than widowed, dragging out life in New York.

"I'd ought to tell her," Mr. Parmalee thought. "It ain't right to let her keep on thinking that her husband murdered her. But then it goes awfully against a feller's grain to peach on the girl he meant to marry. Still-----"

The remorseful reflection haunted him, do what he would. He took to dreaming of the young baronet, too. Once he saw him in his shroud, lying dead on the stone terrace, and at sight of him the corpse had risen up, ghastly in its grave clothes, and, pointing one quivering finger at him, said, in an awful voice:

"G. W. Parmalee, it is you who have done this!"

And Mr. Parmalee had started up in bed, the cold sweat standing on his brow like a shower of pease.

"I won't stand this, by thunder!" thought the artist next morning, in a fit of desperation. "I'll write up to New York this very day and tell her all, so help me Bob!"

But "*l'homme propose*"---you know the proverb. Squire Brown, who lived half a mile off, and had never heard of Harriet in his life, altered Mr. Parmalee's plans.

The worthy squire, jogging along in his cart from market, came upon the artist, sitting on the top rail of the gate, whittling, and looking gloomily dejected.

"Hi! George, my boy!" cried out the squire, "what's gone wrong? You look as dismal as a graveyard!"

"W-a-a-I!" drawled the artist, who wasn't going to tell his troubles on the house-tops, "there ain't nothin' much to speak of. It's the all-fired dullness of this pesky one-horse village, where there ain't nothin' stirrin', 'cept flies in fly-time, from one year's end to t'other."

"See what comes of traveling," said Squire Brown. "If you had stayed at home, instead of flying round England, you'd have been as right as a trivet. My 'pinion is, you've been and left a gal behind. Here's a London paper for you. My missus gets 'em every mail. Perhaps you'll see your gal's name in the list of marriages."

Mr. Parmalee took the paper chucked at him with languid indifference.

"Any news?" he asked.

"Lots---just suited to your complaint. A coal mine in Cornwall's been and caved in and buried alive fifteen workmen; there's been a horrid riot in Leeds; and a baronet in Devonshire is sentenced to be hung for murdering his wife."

Mr. Parmalee gave one yell---one horrid yell, like a Comanche war-whoop---and leaped off the fence.

"What did you say?" he roared. "A baronet in Devonshire for murdering his wife?"

"Thunder!" ejaculated Squire Brown. "You didn't know him, did you? Maybe you took his picture when in England? Yes, a baronet, and his name it's Sir Everard Kingsland."

With an unearthly groan, Mr. Parmalee tore open the paper.

"They haven't hanged him yet, have they?" he gasped. "Oh, good Lord above! what have I done?"

Squire Brown stared, a spectacle of dense bewilderment.

"You didn't do the murder, I hope?" he asked.

The squire rode away, and Mr. Parmalee sat for a good hour, half stupefied over the account. The paper contained a resume of the trial, from first to last---dwelling particularly on Miss Silver's evidence, and ending with the sentence of the court.

The paper dropped from the artist's paralyzed hand. He covered his face and sat in a trance of horror and remorse. His mother came to call him to dinner, and as he looked up in answer to her call, she started back with a scream at sight of his unearthly face.

"Lor' a-massy, George Washington! what ever has come to you?"

"Pack up my clean socks and shirts, mother," he said. "I'm going back to England by the first steamer."

Late next evening Mr. Parmalee reached New York. Early the following morning he strode up to the brownstone mansion of Mr. Denover and sharply rang the bell.

"Is Lady---I mean, is Mr. Denover's niece to home?"

The servant ushered him into the drawing-room.

"Who shall I say?"

Mr. Parmalee handed her his card.

"Give her that. Tell her it's a matter of life and death."

The servant stared, took the pasteboard and vanished. Ten minutes after, and Harriet, in a white morning robe, pale and terrified, hurried in.

"Mr. Parmalee, has anything---have you heard----- Oh, what is it?"

"It is this, Lady Kingsland: your husband has been arrested and tried for your murder!"

She clasped her hands together and sunk into a seat. She did not cry out or exclaim. She sat aghast.

"He has been tried and condemned, and-----"

He could not finish the sentence, out of pity for that death-like face.

But she understood him, and a scream rang through the house which those who heard it might never forget.

"Oh, my God! he is condemned to be hanged!"

"He is," said Mr. Parmalee; "but we'll stop 'em. Now, don't you go and excite yourself, my lady, because you'll need all your strength and presence of mind in this here emergency. There's a steamer for Liverpool to-morrow. I secured our passage before I ever came here."

"May the great God grant we be in time! Oh, my love! my darling! my husband! I never thought of this. Let me but save you, and I am ready to die!"

"Only hear her!" cried the electrified artist, "talking like that about the man she thinks stabbed her. I do believe she loves him yet."

"With my whole heart. I would die this instant to save him. I love him as dearly as when I stood beside him at the altar a blessed bride."

"Well, I'll be darned," burst out Mr. Parmalee, "if this don't beat all creation! Now, then, what would you give to know it was not Sir Everard who stabbed you that night?"

"Not Sir Everard? But I saw him; I heard him speak. He did it in a moment of madness, Mr. Parmalee, and Heaven only knows what anguish and remorse he has suffered since."

"I hope so," said Mr. Parmalee. "I hope he's gone through piles of agony, for I don't like a bone in his body, if it comes to that. But, I repeat, it was not your husband who stabbed you on the stone terrace that dismal night. It was---it was Sybilla Silver!"

"What?"

"Yes, ma'am---sounds incredible, but it's a fact. She rigged out in a suit of Sir Everard's clothes, mimicked his voice, and did the deed. I saw her face when she pitched you over the rail as plain as I see your'n this minute, and I'm ready to swear to it through all the courts in Christendom. She hated you like pisen, and the baronet, too, and she thinks she's put an end to you both; but if we don't give her an eye-opener pretty soon, my name ain't Parmalee."

She sunk on her knees and held up her clasped hands.

"Thank God! thank God! thank God!"

Next day they sailed for England. The passage was all that could be desired, even by the impatience of Harriet.

They arrived in Liverpool. Mr. Parmalee and his companion posted full speed down to Devonshire. In the luminous dusk of the soft May evening they reached Worrel, Harriet's thick veil hiding her from every eye.

"We'll go to Mr. Bryson's first," said Parmalee, Bryson being Sir Everard's lawyer. "We're in the very nick of time; to-morrow morning at day-dawn is fixed for-----"

"Oh, hush!" in a voice of agony; "not that fearful word!"

They reached the house of Mr. Bryson. He sat over his eight-o'clock cup of tea, with a very gloomy face. He had known Sir Everard all his life---he had known his beautiful bride, so passionately beloved. He had bidden the doomed baronet a last farewell that afternoon.

"He never did it," said he to himself. "There is a horrible mystery somewhere. He never did it---I could stake my life on his innocence---and he is to die to-morrow, poor fellow! That missing man, Parmalee, did it, and that fierce young woman with the big black eyes and deceitful tongue was his aider and abettor. If I could only find that man!"

A servant entered with a card, "G. W. Parmalee." The lawyer rose with a cry.

"Good Heaven above! It can't be! It's too good to be true! He never would rush into the lion's den in this way. John Thomas, who gave you this?"

"Which the gentleman is in the droring-room, sir," responded John Thomas, "as likewise the lady."

Mr. Bryson rushed for the drawing-room, flung wide the door, and confronted Mr. Parmalee.

"Good-evening, squire," said the American.

"You here!" gasped the Sawyer---"the man for whom we have been scouring the kingdom!"

"You'd oughter scoured the Atlantic," replied the artist, with infinite calm. "I've been home to see my folks. I suppose you wanted me to throw a little light on that 'ere horrid murder?"

"I suspect you know more of that murder than any other man alive!" said the lawyer.

"Do tell! Well, now, I ain't a-going to deny it---I do know all about it, squire."

"What?"

"Precisely! Yes, sir. I saw the deed done."

"You did? Good heavens!"

"Don't swear, squire. Yes, I saw the stab given, with that 'ere long knife; and it wasn't the baronet did it, either, though you're going to hang him for it to-morrow."

"In Heaven's name, man, who did the deed?"

"Sybilla Silver!"

"I knew it---I thought it--I said it! The she-devil! Poor, poor Lady Kingsland!"

"Ma'am," said the American, turning to his veiled companion, "perhaps it will relieve Mr. Bryson's gushing bosom to behold your face. Jest lift that 'ere veil."

"All-merciful Heaven! the dead alive! Lady Kingsland!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

HIGHLY SENSATIONAL.

Sybilla Silver went straight from the prison cell of Sir Everard to the sick-room of his mother. It was almost eleven when she reached the Court, but they watched the night through in that house of mourning.

Leaving the fly before the front entrance, Sybilla stole round to that side door she had used the memorable night of March tenth. She admitted herself without difficulty, and proceeded at once to Lady Kingsland's sick-room.

She tapped lightly at the door. It was opened instantly, and the pale face of Mildred looked out.

"You here! How dare you, you cruel, wicked, merciless woman!" she indignantly cried.

"Hard words, Miss Kingsland. Let me in, if you please---I wish to see your mother."

"You shall not come in! The sight of you will kill her! Was it not enough to swear away the life of her only son? Do you want to blast her dying hours with the sight of your base, treacherous face?"

With a look of scornful contempt, Sybilla took her by the shoulder and drew her out of the room.

"Don't be an idiot, Mildred Kingsland! I gave my evidence---how could I help it? It wasn't my fault that your brother murdered his wife. I must see your mother for ten minutes. I bring a last message from her son."

"You have been to prison!" she cried. "You dare look my brother in the face!"

"Just as easily as I do his sister. Am I to see Lady Kingsland, or shall I go as I came, with Sir Everard's message undelivered?"

"The sight of you will kill her."

"We must risk that."

She passed into the room as she spoke.

"Wait here," she said. "I must see her quite alone, but it will only be for a few minutes."

She closed the door and stood alone in the sick lady's room.

"Is it you, Mildred? The light is too strong."

"It is not Mildred, my lady. It is I."

"Sybilla Silver!"

No words can describe the look of agony, of terror, of repulsion, that crossed my lady's face. She held up both hands with a gesture of loathing and horror.

"Keep off!" she cried. "You murderess!"

"Yes," she cried, "that is the word---murderess!---for I murdered your daughter-in-law. You never liked her, you know, Lady Kingsland. Surely, then, when I stabbed her and threw her into the sea, I did you a good turn. Lie still, and listen to me. I have a long story to tell you, beginning with the astrologer's prediction."

With fiendish composure Sybilla repeated the story she had told Sir Everard, while Lady Kingsland lay paralyzed and listened.

The atrocious revelation ended, she looked at her prostrate foe with a diabolical smile.

"My oath is kept; the prediction is fulfilled. In a few hours the last of the Kingslands dies by the hand of the common hangman. I have told you all, and I dare you to injure one hair of my head. Within the hour my journey from England commences. Search for last year's snow, for last September's partridges, and when you find them you may hope to find Sybilla Silver. Burn the prediction, destroy my grandmother's portrait and lock of hair, so carefully hidden away for many years. Their work is done, and my vengeance is complete. Lady Kingsland, farewell!"

"Murderess!" spoke a deep and awful voice---"murderess! murderess!"

"Ah-h-h-h-h!"

With a shriek of wordless affright, Sybilla Silver leaped back, and stood cowering against the wall. For the dead had risen and stood before her. The phantom slowly advanced.

"Murderess, confess your guilt!"

"Mercy, mercy! mercy!" shrieked Sybilla Silver. "Spare me! Touch me not! Oh, God! what is this?"

"Confess!"

"I confess---I murdered you---I stabbed you! Sir Everard is innocent! Keep off! Mercy! mercy!"

With an unearthly scream, the horrified woman threw up both arms to keep off the awful vision, and fell forward in strong convulsions.

"Very well done," said Mr. Bryson, entering briskly. "I don't think we need any further proof of this lady's guilt. You have played ghost to some purpose, my dear Lady Kingsland. Come in, gentlemen. We'll have no trouble carrying off our prize."

He paused, and stepped back with a blanched face, for Lady Kingsland lay writhing in the last agony.

With a wild cry, Mildred threw herself on her knees by her mother's side.

"Mamma---dear mamma---don't look like that! Harriet is not dead. She is here alive. It was that dreadful woman who tried to kill her. Everard is innocent, as we knew he was. He will be here with us in a day or two."

The dying woman was conscious. Her eyes turned and fixed on Harriet. The white disguise had been thrown off. She came over to the bedside, pale and beautiful.

"Mother," she said, sweetly, "it is indeed I. Dear mother, bless me once."

"May God bless you and forgive me! Tell Everard---" She never finished the sentence. With the name of the son she idolized upon her lips, Lady Kingsland was dead.

Harriet's presence of mind did not forsake her. Reverently she kissed the dead face, closed the eyes, and rose.

"The dead are free from suffering. Our first duty is to the living. Take me to my husband!"

The constable lifted Sybilla unceremoniously.

The servants gathered outside the door gave way, and he placed her in the carriage which had conveyed them to the house.

Mr. Parmalee went with him, and Lady Kingsland and the lawyer took possession of the fly that stood waiting for Miss Silver.

A minute later and they were flying, swift as lash and shout could urge them, toward Worrel Jail.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"AFTER STORM, THE SUNSHINE."

Earlier in the evening, when Harriet had told her story to Mr. Bryson, that gentleman had proceeded at once to the prison to inform the prisoner and the officials that the murdered lady was alive.

There he found the warden of the prison and the clergyman, listening with very perplexed faces to a story the prisoner was narrating.

"This is a most extraordinary revelation," the clergyman was saying. "I really don't know what to think."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Bryson.

"A story which, wildly incredible as it seems, is yet true as Holy Writ," answered the prisoner. "The real murderer is found. She has been here, and admitted her guilt."

"What!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Sybilla Silver?"

"Why!" cried the warden, in wonder, "you, too?"

"Exactly," said Mr. Bryson, with a nod. "I know all about it. A most important witness has turned up---no other than the missing man, Mr. Parmalee. He saw the deed done---saw Sybilla Silver, dressed in Sir Everard's clothes, do it, and has come all the way from America to testify against her. Sir Everard, my dear friend, from the bottom of my soul I congratulate you on your most blessed escape!"

"Thank you!" he said. "If my life is spared, it is for some good end, no doubt. Thank God! A felon's death would have been very bitter, and for my mother's sake I rejoice."

"Not for your own?"

"I have lost all that made life sweet. My wife is in heaven. For me earth holds nothing but penitence and remorse."

"I am not so sure about that. I have better news for you even than the news I have told. My dear friend, can you bear a great shock---a shock of joy?"

He sprung up in bed, electrified.

"Speak!" he gasped. "Oh, for God's sake-----"

"Your wife is alive!"

There was a simultaneous cry.

Mr. Bryson hurried on rapidly:

"Sybilla Silver stabbed her, and threw her over upon the shore. Mr. Parmalee picked her up---not dead, but badly wounded---took her on board a vessel---took her finally to America. Sybilla Silver deceived your poor wife as she deceived us all. Lady Kingsland thought it was you, Sir Everard. But she is alive and well, and in Worrel at this very moment. Our first business is to cage our bird before she flies. Can you aid us any, Sir Everard? Where are we most likely to find her?"

"At the Court," the baronet answered. "She left here to go there---to kill my mother with her horrible news, if she could."

"We will leave you now," Mr. Bryson said, rising. "Come, gentlemen; Sir Everard wants to be alone. I am off to secure my prisoner."

It was on his way back to his own house that Mr. Bryson lighted on his ghostly plan for frightening Sybilla. How well it succeeded you know.

She was still insensible when they reached the prison, and was handed over to the proper authorities. Harriet turned her imploring face toward the lawyer.

"Let me go to my husband! Oh, dear Mr. Bryson, let me go at once!"

They led her to the door. The jailer admitted her and closed it again. She was in her husband's prison-cell. Her arms were around his neck, her tears, her kisses raining on his face.

"Oh, my darling, my darling! my life, my love, my husband!"

"Harriet!"

With a great cry he rose and held her to his heart.

"My wife, my wife!"

And then, weak with long illness and repeated shocks---this last, greatest shock of all---he sat down, faint unto death.

"Oh, my love, my wife! to think that I should hold you once more in my arms, look once more into your living face! My wife, my wife! How cruel, how merciless I have been to you! May God forgive me! I will forgive myself---never!"

"Not one word! Between us there can be no such thing as forgiveness. We could neither of us have acted other than as we did. My oath bound me---your honor was at stake. We have both suffered---Heaven only knows how deeply. But it is past now. Nothing in this lower world shall ever come between us again, my beloved!"

"Not even death," he said, folding her close to his heart.

One month after and Sir Everard Kingsland, his wife, and sister quitted England for the Continent, not to make the grand tour and return, but to reside for years. England was too full of painful memories; under the sunlit skies of beautiful Italy they were going to forget.

Sybilla Silver was dead. All her plans had failed---her oath of vengeance was broken. Sir Everard and his bride were triumphant. She had failed---miserably failed; she thought of it until she went mad---stark, staring mad. Her piercing shrieks rang through the stony prison all day and all night long, until one night, in a paroxysm of frenzy, she had dashed her head against the wall. They found her, in the morning, dead.

* * * * *

Out into the lazy June sunshine the steamer glided. With his handsome wife on his arm, the young baronet stood looking his last at his native land, his face infinitely happy.

"For years," he said, with a smile---"for life, perhaps, Harriet. I feel as if I never wished to return."

"But we shall," she said. "England is home. A few happy years in fair foreign lands, and then, Everard, back to the old land. But first, I confess, I should like again to see America, and Uncle Denver, and"---with a little laugh---"George Washington Parmalee."

For Mr. Parmalee had gone back to Dobbsville, at peace with all the world, Sir Everard Kingsland included.

"You're a brick, baronet," his parting speech had been, as he wrung that young man's hand; "you air, I swan! And your wife's another! Long may you wave!"

Sir Everard laughed aloud now at the recollection.

"Money can never repay our obligation to that worthy artist. May his shadow never be less! We shall go over to Dobbsville and see him, and have our pictures taken, next year. Look, Harriet! how the chalky cliffs are melting into the

blue above! One parting peep at England, and so a long good-by to the old land!" he said, taking off his hat, and standing, radiant and happy, with the June sunlight on his handsome head.