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[FINLEY MARTHA]

*No. 1/2 1871*

**WANTED—A PEDIGREE.**





# WANTED—A PEDIGREE.

BY

MARTHA FINLEY (FARQUHARSON),

AUTHOR OF "AN OLD-FASHIONED BOY," "LILLIAN," "ELSIE DIMSMORE,"  
ETC., ETC.

"They  
Can pray upon occasion, talk of heaven,  
Turn up their goggling eyeballs, rail at vice,  
Dissemble, lie, and preach, like any priest."

OTWAY'S ORPHAN.

"Seeming devotion doth but gild the knave,  
That's neither faithful, honest, just, nor brave:  
But when religion doth with virtue join,  
It makes a hero like an angel shine."

WALLER.



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## PREFACE.

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**I**T is to be supposed that, in writing a book, an author has usually some object above and beyond the mere entertainment of the reader. The present volume is no exception to this general rule. Its design is to show wherein the tares sown by the wicked one among the wheat differ from the good seed of the kingdom; how the pure gold of true Christianity may be distinguished from its counterfeits — hypocrisy and self-righteousness. Who may countervail the King's damage from mistakes made in these matters? How many, disgusted by the discovery of the hurtful nature of the tares, have rashly concluded that the wheat is no better; or, mistaking a base counterfeit for a fair sample of the true coin of the realm, have condemned both as alike worthless. But do men take the trouble to counterfeit that which has no real value? If not, then does not the very existence of the copy prove that of the original, and testify to its worth?

My story will not have been written in vain, should it convince even one of its readers that these false professors, though *in* the Church, are not *of* it.

M. F.

# CONTENTS.

---

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
A MYSTERY . . . . .	13
CHAPTER II.	
AN EXCHANGE . . . . .	28
CHAPTER III.	
FOREBODINGS . . . . .	36
CHAPTER IV.	
AN UNEXPECTED BLOW . . . . .	42
CHAPTER V.	
THE ARRIVAL . . . . .	48
CHAPTER VI.	
"COMFORT" CAUSES MUCH DISCOMFORT . . . . .	56
CHAPTER VII.	
SURPRISING DISCLOSURE . . . . .	60
CHAPTER VIII.	
KIZZIE SPEAKS HER MIND . . . . .	68
CHAPTER IX.	
A STRANGER IN A STRANGE PLACE . . . . .	78
CHAPTER X.	
RULE OF A STRONG-MINDED WOMAN . . . . .	97
CHAPTER XI.	
NEW FRIENDS . . . . .	113



	<b>CHAPTER XII.</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>A YOUNG TIGRESS</b>	. . . . .	<b>118</b>
	<b>CHAPTER XIII.</b>	
<b>PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN</b>	. . . . .	<b>126</b>
	<b>CHAPTER XIV.</b>	
<b>A PATTERN BOY</b>	. . . . .	<b>133</b>
	<b>CHAPTER XV.</b>	
<b>PETTICOAT GOVERNMENT</b>	. . . . .	<b>138</b>
	<b>CHAPTER XVI.</b>	
<b>THE WOMAN IN BLACK</b>	. . . . .	<b>147</b>
	<b>CHAPTER XVII.</b>	
<b>WATCHED</b>	. . . . .	<b>162</b>
	<b>CHAPTER XVIII.</b>	
<b>UNSATISFIED CURIOSITY</b>	. . . . .	<b>171</b>
	<b>CHAPTER XIX.</b>	
<b>UNDER SURVEILLANCE</b>	. . . . .	<b>177</b>
	<b>CHAPTER XX.</b>	
<b>ORIGINAL STYLE OF COURTSHIP</b>	. . . . .	<b>189</b>
	<b>CHAPTER XXI.</b>	
<b>OVERWHELMED</b>	. . . . .	<b>197</b>
	<b>CHAPTER XXII.</b>	
<b>A HOMELESS WANDERER</b>	. . . . .	<b>207</b>
	<b>CHAPTER XXIII.</b>	
<b>REBELLION IN THE CAMP</b>	. . . . .	<b>217</b>
	<b>CHAPTER XXIV.</b>	
<b>GHOST OR MORTAL?</b>	. . . . .	<b>226</b>

*CONTENTS.*

**xi**

	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXV.</b>	
<b>A TERRIFIED INTRUDER . . . . .</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXVI.</b>	
<b>DOUBTS, HOPES, AND FEARS . . . . .</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXVII.</b>	
<b>THE STORY AUNT LETTICE TOLD . . . . .</b>	<b>254</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXVIII.</b>	
<b>A GENEROUS OFFER . . . . .</b>	<b>264</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXIX.</b>	
<b>NINA'S CHOICE . . . . .</b>	<b>269</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXX.</b>	
<b>HAUNTED . . . . .</b>	<b>287</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXI.</b>	
<b>CLOUDS AND SUNLIGHT . . . . .</b>	<b>296</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXII.</b>	
<b>A GROWING FRIENDSHIP . . . . .</b>	<b>307</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXIII.</b>	
<b>A NEW EFFORT OF THE ENEMY . . . . .</b>	<b>312</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXIV.</b>	
<b>THE WOMAN IN BLACK AGAIN . . . . .</b>	<b>323</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXV.</b>	
<b>VARYING MOODS . . . . .</b>	<b>331</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXVI.</b>	
<b>A NEW-COMER . . . . .</b>	<b>346</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXVII.</b>	
<b>JEALOUSY, AND WHAT CAME OF IT . . . . .</b>	<b>358</b>

	PAGE
CHAPTER XXXVIII.	
A CHAPTER OF MYSTERIES AND SURPRISES . . . . .	371
CHAPTER XXXIX.	
A STRANGE WARNING . . . . .	399
CHAPTER XL.	
A FEARFUL ALTERNATIVE . . . . .	409
CHAPTER XLI.	
THE ORDEAL . . . . .	422
CHAPTER XLII.	
AVENGED . . . . .	431
CHAPTER XLIII.	
TURNING STATE'S EVIDENCE . . . . .	443
CHAPTER XLIV.	
GREAT SORROW AND GREAT JOY . . . . .	455
CHAPTER XLV.	
CAUGHT IN HER OWN NET . . . . .	465
CHAPTER XLVI.	
OAKDALE . . . . .	478
CHAPTER XLVII.	
THE SPOILER SPOILED . . . . .	483
CHAPTER XLVIII.	
RETROSPECTION . . . . .	501
CHAPTER XLIX.	
RETRIBUTION . . . . .	504
CHAPTER L.	
SOWING AND REAPING . . . . .	509

# WANTED—A PEDIGREE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A MYSTERY.

**T**HERE was not on the banks of the Hudson a more princely residence than that of Avonmore. A spacious mansion-house of Gothic architecture, standing high above the river and commanding a magnificent view of its bright waters, with their bordering hills and mountains; itself half hidden by grand old forest-trees that gathered close about it, and here and there, singly or in groups, dotted the rich lawn in the centre of which it stood. The terraced hill-sides were bordered with shrubbery and gay with many-colored flowers; while a large conservatory and grapery on the southern slope of the hill, and in the rear of the dwelling a well-kept vegetable garden and a fine old orchard filled with peach, apple, pear, and cherry trees, added their attractions to the place.

Lovely at all seasons of the year, it had never been more so than on the bright June day that witnessed the opening scenes of our story. The river flashed and sparkled in the sunlight, the trees wore their richest summer robes, casting a cool shade on the carpet of emerald velvet at their feet, while lilac and snowball bushes, roses, violets, lilies, tulips, and golden crocus, with many another shrub and flower, made gay the terraces and filled the air with fragrance.

The shadows were lengthening on the grass, and a cool re-

freshing breeze gently stirred the leaves on tree and shrub, as a carriage came dashing along the road from the nearest steamboat-landing, the driver urging on his horses with whip and voice. But they had reached ascending ground, and necessarily slackened their speed as they toiled up the broad, gravelled road that, winding about the hill, at length brought the traveller to the great iron gates that gave admittance to the Avonmore estate.

A pair of blue eyes, belonging to a pale face more than ordinarily handsome but for the almost stony look of anguish it wore at that moment, glanced from the carriage-window as the horses began the ascent. A heavy sigh, or rather groan, burst from the man's bosom as he noted their tardy movements. Then giving a sudden jerk to the check-string, "Jarvis," he called, hoarsely, "let me get out. I can't ask you to urge the horses up-hill, but I can walk faster than this, I think." Then dashing open the door and springing to the ground, "Drive at once to the stables, and don't disturb her with the noise of wheels," he said, moving on with rapid strides even while he spoke.

The man looked after him with an expression of intense sympathy on his dusky face. "Poor young marster," he muttered; "would n't he gib ebery drop o' blood in his veins to save her? How fast he goes! Hope he'll git dere in time."

The gentleman, a powerfully-built and vigorous young man, was climbing the hill with remarkable celerity; yet to himself it seemed that a fearful nightmare oppressed him, and that, while longing to fly, he but crept over the ground at a snail's pace. Yet the gate was reached at last, the lawn rapidly traversed, and, passing up the two or three steps that led into the porch before the front entrance, he stood for a moment leaning against one of its pillars, trying to recover his breath, well-nigh exhausted by his hurried ascent.

The doors stood wide open, allowing the fresh, sweet summer air to pass freely through the lordly, marble-paved hall that, running the entire width of the house, gave through



the door at the farther end a tempting view of lawn and orchard, with a background of richly-wooded hills. The hall itself was adorned with exquisite marble statues, and lovely flowering shrubs in pots set at intervals along the beautifully frescoed walls. A few rare paintings were there too; and other open doors gave glimpses into spacious and luxuriantly-furnished apartments; while a broad staircase of white marble with sumptuously-carved balustrade led to the story above. Everything betokened wealth, refinement, and taste. But the eyes that looked upon them at that moment saw them only as we see our accidental surroundings when the mind is fearfully intent upon matters of vital importance; heeded naught save the noiseless approach of a servant who seemed to have been on the watch for his coming.

The gentleman started eagerly forward, almost gasping for breath, while a look of mute, agonized inquiry in his searching blue eyes asked the question his pale lips refused to utter.

“My mistress still lives, sir,” answered the man, with a face full of sympathy, and scarcely allowing his voice to rise above a whisper.

“Thank God! then I am not too late!”

The servant barely caught the words, breathed in low, husky tones, as his master stepped past him, and with quick, but cautious tread moved down the hall toward his wife’s apartments.

As he did so, there issued from them a tall female figure, richly attired, and holding an embroidered handkerchief to her eyes. She came gliding swiftly toward him.

“Ah, my dear Ernest, thank heaven that you are come in time to receive her last sigh!” she sobbed, laying her hand upon his arm; “but oh, do, I beseech you, try to control your feelings, that you may not disturb her last moments, or hasten her end.”

He shook her off with a gesture of loathing which she never forgot or forgave. Since the first moment of their acquaintance, he had found it impossible to regard this woman with anything but distrust and aversion, spite of the honeyed

accents and flattering words with which she was wont to address him.

“Crocodile tears!” he muttered, while she looked after him with a gleam of fierce anger, hatred, and malicious triumph in her snaky, black eyes.

“Beware, proud and haughty ingrate: your time here is short!” she muttered, as she hastily followed him, with her accustomed noiseless, gliding step, entering the sick-room at almost the same instant, and gloating over the anguish with which she knew the scene there presented must wring his manly heart.

On a low French bedstead, at the farther end of the spacious, elegantly-furnished apartment, lay the almost lifeless form of his idolized young wife. The face that rested among those pillows was one of marvellous beauty: yes, even now, with the pallor of death upon it, and its gray shadows gathering about the magnificent eyes; but they were closed, and the long black lashes rested like a heavy silken fringe upon the exquisitely-rounded cheek; they, and the delicately-pencilled brows and the rich masses of purplish black hair straggling over the pillows, contrasting vividly with the dead, marble whiteness of the face—for the very lips were colorless. One small, beautifully-moulded hand lay nerveless and cold on the outside of the counterpane, while the attendant physician held the other, his fingers encircling the delicate wrist, as he anxiously counted its slow and feeble pulsations.

There was no movement, nor the slightest sign of life, as her husband drew near; the woman who had met him in the hall gliding on behind him, and stationing herself at the foot of the bed. She still held her embroidered handkerchief to her face, ostensibly to wipe away her tears, but really to hide the malicious gleam in her evil eyes as she beheld the anguish so plainly depicted upon the features of the young husband.

“My Nina, my darling, my precious, precious wife!” he cried, with sharp agony in his tones, as he cast himself on his knees by the bedside, seizing the cold hand and covering it

with burning kisses and tears. "Have I come too late? are you indeed gone without one parting word or look of love for me, the husband who idolizes you? O Nina, I cannot, *cannot* give you up! Speak but one word, dearest! open those glorious eyes but once again, that I may read in them your love for your wretched husband."

She had not spoken or moved for hours; an almost imperceptible breathing, and a faint, fluttering pulse had alone told that she yet lived; but that cry aroused her; the eyes opened and looked up into his with an expression of intense, yearning affection, and of sorrowful farewell. Then the hand was feebly raised to grasp his arm, and the lips moved.

He bent his ear to catch the sound, but an incoherent murmur was all that reached it; and she relapsed into insensibility.

But again she roused herself, looking up into his face with an expression that startled him—a glance that seemed to appeal to him for protection against some enemy; then her eyes wandered about the room as if in search of something.

"What is it, darling?" he asked; "oh, have you not strength to speak one word?"

She looked at him again—the beautiful eyes full of love, grief, and anxiety. Then they sought the dark face at the foot of the bed, resting there for a single instant with such an expression of horror and fear that he started involuntarily, and turned his in the same direction.

The woman was sobbing behind her handkerchief: perhaps had missed the look.

The dying fingers closed convulsively over his; again the eyes were lifted to his face with an expression of agonized entreaty that wrung his heart.

"Oh, darling, what is it you would tell me? what is it you would ask of me?" he cried; "can you not speak a word?"

She lifted her head from the pillow; there was an instant's fearful struggle for speech, an inarticulate murmur, and she fell back and expired.

During the moment that the struggle lasted, the face at the foot of the bed had become of an ashen hue, and the woman had held her breath with terror ; but the color returned to it now. She breathed freely ; there was a gleam of malicious triumph in her eyes, and she exchanged a quick, furtive glance of satisfaction with the nurse—a middle-aged woman of the lower class, who stood on the farther side of the bed, and who had seemed scarcely less agitated than herself. Then the one again fell to sobbing vehemently behind her embroidered handkerchief, in apparently inconsolable grief, the other to sighing and wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, while the doctor gently laid down the hand he had been holding, and turned away to hide his emotion.

The husband was one of those strong characters who to acute sensibilities unite great power of self-control ; at other times he had endured much with little outward show of the grief or passion that was consuming him within. But this blow, so sudden, so terrible, fell upon him with crushing weight. He seemed stunned, bewildered ; for a moment he did not change his position, but continued to kneel there at the bedside, with the cold hand fast clasped in his, and his eyes fixed in a stony gaze upon the dead, white face ; but suddenly he started up and grasped the physician's arm with a wild cry, "Doctor, doctor, this is a deadly swoon, and you stand idly by, making no effort to revive her ! something must be done instantly, *instantly*, I say !"

"My dear sir, it would be utterly useless," replied the doctor, deeply moved ; "she is gone ; this is but lifeless clay."

"No, no, that cannot be !" he cried in piercing tones. "Why, but a few hours since I left her in perfect health ; this is but a swooning fit, and she must, she *will* recover from it ! Make haste to use all the remedies known to your art ! haste, haste, I say, or it will be too late !"

"Alas, my dear sir, it is already too late," replied the physician, in a tone of deep compassion ; "life is entirely extinct ; but while it remained, nothing was neglected that could be done to save her."

“I do not believe she is gone!” cried the husband. “I will not give her up! this is only a trance, and I will have remedies tried. Bestir yourselves, all of you!” and he glanced fiercely at the two women; “bring hot water to put to her feet—ice for her head. Doctor, where is your lancet? bleed her, do anything—everything, for she must be saved!”

“Certainly, Ernest, every means must be tried, if there remains the slightest hope,” replied the richly-dressed woman, in tones that seemed full of sympathy for his grief. “Go, nurse; be quick!” she added, turning to the other with an imperative gesture, then following her as she hastily left the room.

The doctor took the slender wrist in his fingers, felt for the pulse, but in vain; placed his hand on the heart, bent his ear to catch the sound of breathing—then shook his head sorrowfully.

“There is not the slightest room for doubt, my poor friend,” he said, in low, pitying tones. “She is gone to a better world; let that thought comfort you. If you had seen the suffering she endured for the last twelve hours, you would not wish to recall her from a world where pain and anguish and bereavement are unknown.”

“No,” he answered, in heart-broken accents; “my grief is very selfish. But oh, Nina, my precious one! you loved me too well to forsake me willingly, and I cannot banish a lingering hope.”

He glanced hurriedly about the room; sprang to the bureau, caught up a hand-glass that lay there, and returning held it to her lips. Its bright surface remained undimmed, and with a despairing cry he threw it from him and again sank on his knees by her side, burying his face in the bedclothes, while his whole frame shook with overpowering emotion.

The physician, a kind-hearted Christian man, knelt by his side and poured out a fervent prayer for him, asking in his behalf the comfort and consolation that God alone can give.

But the poor mourner seemed neither to hear nor heed;



and feeling how utterly vain were all human efforts to console in such an hour as this, he made no attempt to address him, but silently withdrew, leaving the bereaved heart alone with its dead.

Meanwhile, the nurse, intent on prompt obedience to her master's orders, was hurrying toward the kitchen. But the other woman following rapidly, suddenly clutched her by the arm.

"What do you mean? where are you going? what do you intend to do?" she asked, in an excited, though suppressed tone, while her eyes flashed with latent fury.

"I—I was going for the hot water the masher ordered, ma'am," answered the menial, trembling and stammering; "ain't I to fetch it? Sure and the masher is to be minded when he's here, ma'am; ain't he?"

"Not when his orders are those of a madman," returned the other, with a scornful curl of her lip; "his wife's dead, as dead as if she'd been in her grave a year; and what madness, what folly, to work with a corpse to bring it to life."

"But, ma'am, it might be a mistake. I've heerd of folks bein' waked and buried afore now, when all the time they was alive, as was found out on openin' their coffins afterwards."

"Nonsense! it could n't be in this case. I tell you she's as dead as a door-nail—as dead as her dead baby—and neither you nor I need regret it."

"But the poor gentleman, ma'am; he does take on so that—that I'd hard work to restrain myself from givin' him a word o' comfort."

Her companion clutched her arm again; this time with a force that wrung from her a half-suppressed cry of pain.

"Yes; did I not see it? You would have betrayed me, if I had not been there to stop you; but dare to breathe one word of it," she hissed between her shut teeth, "and I'll—"

The rest of the sentence was whispered close to the ear of the nurse, and she recoiled pale and trembling.

"Oh, no, I'll not, ma'am; never fear for me. I can kape

a sacret with the best o' them. I'll breathe no hint o' it; though me heart does misgive me at the sight o' the masther's terrible grief; and the sin lays heavy on me soul, notwithstanding' that you say his riverence will forgive me for it, and be ready to reward me, too."

"Sin!" cried the other, drawing herself up; "it's no sin that puts me into possession of my rightful inheritance; that takes wealth out of the hands of heretics and gives it to one who belongs to the true Church, and will use it to advance her interests. 'The end sanctifies the means;' for so the Church teaches. You have done her good service, as Father Adrian will tell you, and you shall have your reward; as soon as the business is happily concluded, the promised hundred gold dollars shall be paid into your hands. But betray the thing to him you call your master, and my vengeance shall pursue you to your grave." The expression of her countenance was almost demoniacal, and the knees of her poor tool shook under her with terror.

"Oh, ma'am, ye need n't fear for me!" she gasped, staggering back against the wall. "I'm not the woman to betray them as trusts me, nor them as has been good to me and the childer; but oh, ma'am, I wish I did n't have to face the masther again! An' *she'd* a tould him if she could; she knowed more 'n we thought, ma'am."

"Yes; but, thank heaven, she was too far gone to betray us; though she did her utmost. But you need not stay," she added quickly, while a sudden gleam of satisfaction shot across her features. "There is no further need of your services: old Vashti can lay out the corpse. I will pay you and dismiss you at once."

And taking out her purse, she put several gold pieces into the serving-woman's hand.

"It's too much, ma'am, by half," she said, closing her fingers over it with eager haste. "Mayhap, though, you mane I shall give you the change?" and an expression of anxious inquiry took the place of the eager look with which she had clutched the gold; "but I have n't it, indade."

“Tut, tut! you know I mean you to keep it all. I’m a rich woman now, and can afford to be generous, especially to those who have assisted me in recovering my own. But go, go! you will need to make haste to reach home before dark.”

“The saints in heaven bless you, ma’am; and may you niver want for goold, nor for happiness in this wureld or the next!” cried the nurse, dropping curtsy after curtsy.

“There, there! that will do; I want no more of your blarney: attend strictly to my orders, and that is all I ask of you,” said the haughty woman, dismissing her miserable accomplice with an imperative gesture.

“Yes, ma’am, I’m going. I’ll get me bonnet and shawl, and be off this minit,” she answered meekly; “they’re in the servants’ hall. Good-day, ma’am; an’ ye’ll know where to find me when I’m wanted.”

She dropped a final curtsy and disappeared through a door leading to the back buildings, while madame, gliding swiftly but noiselessly to the other end of the hall, entered a reception-room and stationed herself at a window overlooking the lawn.

She might have stood there five minutes, but to her impatience the time seemed much longer; and a cloud of anger, not unmingled with fear, was gathering over her features; but it vanished, and a smile of exultation took its place as she perceived the figure of the nurse moving hastily down the broad, gravelled carriage-way toward the entrance to the grounds. She watched her till she had passed through the great gates and disappeared on the farther side of the hill; and a gleam of triumph was in her eyes, a mocking smile upon her lips, as she went back into the hall again.

“So far, so well,” she muttered to herself; “my scheme prospers: the most difficult part is accomplished, and I think the rest will not miscarry. Ah! some one approaches: I must be discreet.”

And hastily assuming an expression of inconsolable sorrow, and lifting the embroidered handkerchief to her eyes, she turned and glided forward to meet the physician.

"They are heating water in the kitchen," she said in an undertone; "unfortunately, there was none ready at the moment it was called for; and I have sent for ice, which will be here very shortly."

"It is not worth while," he said, "so far as any hope of restoration is concerned; for there can be no doubt of her death. Even her husband is convinced of that now; and I knew from the first that she could not recover. I should have been sent for much sooner," he added, in a tone of severe reproof; "why was the summons delayed so long?"

"Indeed, by no fault of mine," she answered, with a half-suppressed sob. "But poor, dear Nina was always wilful—a spoiled child, you know; and she had taken a sudden and strange whim into her head, and declared she would have no doctor with her, but trust entirely to me and the nurse; and I found it impossible to persuade her out of it. If Ernest had been here, it might have been different: she would have heard reason from him, no doubt; but as it was, I could do nothing with her, and sent for you at last in defiance of her orders; but alas, too late!" and a heavy sigh burst from her bosom, while a flood of hypocritical tears rained down her cheeks.

There was evident incredulity as well as surprise in the look the physician gave her; but she seemed not to notice it.

"Excuse me," he said, coldly. "I may have been misinformed, but I certainly understood that she was taken with convulsions, and was quite insensible from the first."

"Altogether a mistake, doctor, I do assure you!" she exclaimed, with well-feigned astonishment, and hoping that the tremor of fear in her voice would be mistaken for sorrow. "In that case I should have sent for you instantly. But how is he bearing it—poor, dear fellow?" and her tone changed to one of the deepest commiseration.

"Ah, it is a terrible blow, and he is well-nigh crushed under it," replied the physician, with real, heartfelt sympathy in voice and countenance; "would I had the power to administer true consolation; but He who has sent the trial alone can do that."

“Ah, they were a strongly-attached couple,” said madame, shaking her head and sighing; “my poor, dear niece could not have had a more devoted husband; and she returned his affection fully: they were like a pair of lovers always.”

The doctor bowed a silent adieu, and went slowly and sadly away, while his late companion sent after him a look of hate and fear, then turned and paced noiselessly to and fro from end to end of the hall; pausing now and then in a listening attitude, near the door of the chamber of death, then continuing her stealthy, cat-like movement.

A maid, with a face all swollen with weeping, came to ask if her services were needed, but was motioned back, with the whispered words, “Not yet; your master must not be disturbed till the last minute.”

Half an hour, an hour passed slowly by. She had grown very weary of waiting.

“There must be an end put to this,” she muttered; and with cautious tread she drew near that silent room, and pushing open the door, which had been left on the latch, she glided noiselessly in.

There he still knelt by the side of the bed, with the cold, lifeless hand yet clasped in his, with his eyes riveted upon the still white face, with the same expression of stony grief that had rested upon his features in the first moment of his bereavement; a grief so bitter and despairing that it touched even the hard heart of her whose hand had in some measure wrought his woe, and who had just been exulting and rejoicing in its cause. Yes; even she felt at that instant some commiseration for him, and, turning away with a slight shudder, she stood for several minutes leaning silent and motionless against the wall.

But at length drawing near, she laid her hand gently on his arm.

“Ernest,” she said, in low, musical tones, that seemed full of tenderest compassion, “dear Ernest, I grieve to disturb you; but you know there are kind offices which must be done, that



should have been done ere this, for all that remains to us of our precious one. Will you —”

He rose from his knees, and interrupted her with an imperative gesture commanding silence. At sight of her, at the sound of her voice, he recalled the look of fear and horror in those dying eyes.

“Woman,” he asked, sternly, “what meant the strange expression with which my darling’s eyes turned upon you? what evil thing had you done to excite such fear and dread?”

“I, Ernest?” she cried, in a deeply-injured, yet sweetly-forgiving and tenderly-compassionate tone; “I, who have always so loved and cherished her? Is it possible that the wanderings of a dying mind should seem to you sufficient ground for suspecting me of unkindness to our darling? Oh, how you wrong me! Oh! could I have saved her by laying down my own life, how gladly would I have done it!” she concluded, with a passionate burst of weeping.

There was utter incredulity in the glance he gave her. But with a heavy sigh he said, “It may be that her mind was wandering; yet to me, her look seemed one of perfect intelligence. God judge between us; I will try to leave it with him. Yes,” he added, with an effort, and his voice was low and husky, “I will leave her to you for a brief space; but let it be as brief as possible. I would spend every moment by her side till — till I am forced to — to bury her out of my sight.”

He walked hastily from the room, and shutting himself up in one on the opposite side of the hall, paced to and fro with folded arms and head bowed down upon his breast, till a light tap told him he might return.

Again he stood by the side of his dead. He had found the room darkened, but had opened a shutter so far as to admit light enough to enable him to see the face he loved so well. He turned down the sheet that covered it, and started back with a low cry, as if struck by a sudden blow. Had a new calamity befallen him?

His beautiful young wife lay before him arrayed in her bridal robes; the rich masses of her glossy hair gathered up and arranged as she was wont to wear it, which, with the soft satin and the delicate lace resting against her fair neck, gave her so life-like a look that one might well imagine that she was but "taking of rest in sleep." Yet that was not all. Nestled to her bosom was a lovely babe, a tiny image of herself, but as cold and lifeless as she.

In his overwhelming grief at her loss, the husband and father had utterly forgotten his child; so that it had not even occurred to him to ask if it lived.

"Sweet bud! she but breathed and died," said a soft voice at his elbow; "a sad loss to you and me, Ernest: yet who would have it otherwise? Who could ask to keep her here in this cold, hard world, without the shield of a mother's love?"

"She should never have felt its loss! I would have been father and mother both to my darling—to my Nina's precious little one!" he cried, in a voice of uncontrollable anguish. "O God, why hast thou afflicted me thus? rending from me every tender tie, and leaving me like to a green tree blasted in its youth: parents, brothers and sisters, wife and children, all gone—what have I left to live for?"

"You are indeed sorely afflicted, Ernest, and my heart bleeds for you," murmured the soft, sweet voice again; "but these trials may be the means of your soul's salvation. Let them be so; let them lead you to enter the fold of the true Church, and you will bless God to all eternity for having sent them."

"Leave me! I would be alone," he answered, coldly. "This is no fitting time or place for your proselyting efforts; and truly I should find but small consolation in the creed which would consign my precious ones to the purifying fires of purgatory," he added, with a shudder. "No, no! the faith of the Bible is the only one that can give the least comfort in such an hour as this."

She would have spoken again, but he silenced her with a

look that said he would no longer endure intrusion upon his grief, and she withdrew in sullen anger, muttering to herself, "He seems to forget that he has ceased to be master here; but I shall remind him of it ere long."

The shades of night have closed over the bereaved household; lights have been extinguished, doors and windows secured, and all have retired to rest save two — he who keeps his sad vigil beside his dead, and she who, alone of all to whom the fair young wife and mother has been known, rejoices that she has been taken from among them. A lamp burns low on a little stand beside him, giving just light enough to show him the two dear faces that must so soon be covered from his sight forever; and he sits there with his eyes riveted upon them, mourning as only they mourn from whom all that is bright and beautiful in life has been taken, thinking, thinking; asking himself again and again what it could be that those dying lips struggled so fearfully, yet vainly, to tell him. He would give all he is worth for that untold secret; but alas! death's seal is upon the lips that would have revealed it, and to him it must remain shrouded in mystery.

In *her* room the light is brighter. She has no love for darkness to-night, but shrinks from it in shuddering fear. She has loosened her hair, donned dressing-gown and slippers, and thrown herself into an easy-chair, where she sits with head bowed upon her hands, taking a mental retrospect of the last four days. She does not wish to do so — nay, she would fain forever bury in oblivion the share she has taken in their events; but memory will not be put to sleep, conscience will not be baulked of its revenge. Its stings are terrible; and there is no escape from them. Shudderingly she thinks of the two dead faces in the room below — the little innocent babe and its fair young mother — the avenger whispering, "This is your work."

"Nay," she cries, half aloud; "I did not kill them; I am no murderess!" and shuddering again at that terrible word, she rises up hastily and paces to and fro with her noiseless tread.

“No, no; I did not kill them!” she mutters once more. “I could not know certainly that she would die? many a weaker woman has lived through twice as much; and if I wished, hoped it—made, it may be, some little effort to bring it about, what then? It was but a venial sin at most. And the child—it might have lived, and then I should have gained nothing by her death; nothing but an increase in the chances of some day succeeding to my rightful inheritance; and— But why listen any longer to these accusing thoughts? does not ‘the end sanctify the means’? and having had a good end in view, am I not therefore innocent of all crime? Yes, as innocent and pure as that little dead babe that scarcely saw the light. Did I shorten its life? Well, it thus escaped much suffering; and I secured its salvation by baptizing it while it still breathed. I will trouble myself no more with these vain and foolish regrets.”

As she murmurs the last words to herself, she passes into a small adjoining room, fitted up as an oratory, and kneeling, with bowed head and clasped hands, before a marble crucifix, spends the next hour at her devotions—the posture one of deep humility and self-abasement, the feigned lips muttering prayers, while the heart is full of evil passions. A hypocrite, even before her God.

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## CHAPTER II.

### AN EXCHANGE.

THE sun had set amid a mass of purple, gold, and amber-colored clouds, which still brightened the hill-tops, though the valley lay in shadow; the bull-frogs and the crickets had begun their evening concert, and the fire-flies flitted here and there amid the shrubbery, now showing and

now hiding the light of their tiny lamps. At the little white gate which gave entrance to the neatly-kept front yard of a New England farm-house, shut in by a thick green hedge and shaded by noble old trees, underneath whose wide-spreading branches the grass lay like a velvet carpet, bordered on each side by rows of lovely and sweet-scented flowers, stood Kezia Atkins, watching, somewhat impatiently, for the return of Abner Huff, the hired man, from the neighboring village, whither he had been dispatched on an errand half an hour before.

"There he comes, at last," she murmured, as, after several moments' waiting, she at length caught sight, far down the road, of the white horse he had ridden, and then of the rider himself in his brown home-spun suit.

"Well, Abner, I thought you was never a comin'," she said, as he reined in his steed at the gate. "Did you find Dr. Morris?"

"No; he's off to the city, and won't be back afore to-morrow or next day; and Welsh is down sick. So what's to be done?"

"Well, I guess they can get along without 'em, now."

"She's better then, is she, Kizzie?"

"Well, the worst's over, thank the Lord! And the little girl's a livin' too; but so weak and exhausted-like, that the doctor's afraid he can't save her. But I must n't stop talkin' here." And she hurried into the house, passing round to the back door, which, like the front, opened upon a porch.

Here she was met by a pleasant-faced, middle-aged woman, in a neat calico dress and snow-white cap.

"Was that Abner? Did he find Dr. Morris, Kizzie?" she asked, with an anxious look and tone.

"No, Mrs. Croft. Dr. Morris is gone to the city, and Dr. Welsh is down sick, and can't come. But how are they now?"

"The child's dying, I'm afraid; its breath seems to come slower and slower," was the answer, accompanied by a sorrowful shake of the head.

“It seems hard,” said Kizzie, sighing heavily; “married ten years, and this their first child, and then to lose it right away; after the terrible time she’s had, too.”

“It does seem hard, Kizzie, and my heart bleeds for them; but we know who sends trials, and that His way’s always the best,” Mrs. Croft said, as she turned away and hastened back to her charge.

“True, true enough,” murmured Kezia to herself, sitting down on the doorstep, and resting her elbow on her knee and her head on her hand; “it is the Lord’s doings; and who knows but this dreadful loss may be turned to a blessing to Mrs. Clemmens! P’r’aps it may lead her to think less o’ this world and more of the next; for, dear, sweet woman as she is, she makes no pretensions to bein’ a Christian, as she’s told me herself dozens of times. Then as to him; he’s as honest and good-tempered a man, as kind-hearted, and open-handed, too, as any you’d find in a day’s journey; but he’s all for this world, and likes nothing better than to pick holes in the coats of church members, which, I take it, does n’t make him any better. But he never seems to remember that the good Book gives only one rule for all.”

It was growing darker; the glow of the sunset had entirely faded from the sky, and the stars were peeping out one by one.

A faint light gleamed through the white muslin curtains and bowed shutters of the sick chamber where Mrs. Clemmens lay, her pale, anxious face resting upon a pillow scarcely more colorless than itself, while her sad eyes were riveted upon a little group on the opposite side of the room; a new-born infant lying on Mrs. Croft’s lap, and slowly breathing out its little life, while her husband and the physician stood watching it; the latter with kindly sympathy, the former with the expression of a man who sees his best earthly treasure slipping from his grasp, while he feels himself powerless to retain it.

“Oh, my baby, my baby! must I give you up?” sighed the poor mother, in low, heart-broken accents, while the tears trickled down upon the pillow. “I had thought we would

have such happy days together ; and I would die to save you, my darling ! ”

“ Don’t, Esther, oh don’t ! ” whispered her husband, drawing near. “ I would give all I ’m worth to save the little thing ; but I could much sooner part with it than with you. ”

“ Dear George, I shall still have you left, ” she answered, in the same low tone, and with a loving look up into his face and a gentle, affectionate pressure of the hand in which he had taken hers ; “ but ah, if we could have kept her ! ”

“ ‘ While there ’s life, there ’s hope, ’ ” he said, trying to speak cheerfully.

Again she pressed his hand. There was a moment of hushed waiting : the child stirred slightly, then was still ; the doctor and Mrs. Croft exchanged glances, the father hid his face, and the mother’s grief burst forth afresh.

“ Give it to me ! oh, give it to me ! it cannot hurt it now, ” she sobbed ; “ and I must, I will have it while I can. ”

Mrs. Croft carried it to her, and she took it in her arms, covering the tiny face with her kisses and tears. “ My baby, my darling, ” she moaned, “ my precious little one ; are you indeed taken from me forever, just as I felt that you were mine ? Oh, it is too hard, too hard ! ”

“ Esther, you will hurt yourself, ” said her husband, anxiously.

“ Do not, my dear Mrs. Clemmens, do not excite yourself so, ” entreated the physician ; “ it will injure you, for you have not strength to bear it. ”

“ I cannot help it, ” she said, with a fresh burst of grief. “ I have always loved children so dearly, always wanted to have them of my own ; and now to lose it — oh, it is very hard. Hark ! What was that ? ” And she would have started up in the bed, had not her husband held her down.

“ Lie still, Esther, ” he said, in tones tremulous with excitement. “ You will kill yourself. ”

Then all listened breathlessly for a repetition of the sound that had so startled them. It came again. Yes ; it was the

cry of an infant, and close at hand; there could be no mistake. And Mrs. Clemmens looked almost wild, as she grasped her husband's arm, exclaiming, "Go for it, George! Oh, go quickly, and bring it here. Who knows but God has sent us another to fill the place of the one he has taken!"

Scarcely less excited than his wife, the farmer darted from the room, and returned the next instant bearing in his arms a bundle wrapped in a cradle-blanket, a little wailing, half-smothered cry plainly telling what it was. He carried it to the light, and with trembling hand hastily tore aside the covering, revealing the face of a lovely babe, apparently but a few days old.

"What a darling!" cried Mrs. Croft, bending eagerly over the little creature.

"Not more than a week old, if that," said the doctor, examining it in his turn.

"Oh, bring it here, and the light too, that I may see it!" entreated Mrs. Clemmens, in a voice tremulous with excitement as well as weakness. "Is it a little girl? Oh, I hope it is!"

"Yes, I should think so; and the child of rich folks, too; for dear, dear! just look at the clothes; the finest stuff I ever saw; and such work on 'em, and such lace!" cried Mrs. Croft. "Yes, carry it over to your wife, Mr. Clemmens, and I will hold the light. Did ever you see the like, Esther?"

"Oh, the darling, the sweet, pretty pet!" Mrs. Clemmens exclaimed, as they held it up to her view. "What unnatural wretches the parents must be. How could they; how *could* they have the heart to forsake it, and leave it to the mercy of strangers?"

"Here is a note pinned to the blanket," said Mrs. Croft, eagerly.

And disengaging it, she handed it to the doctor, who read aloud: "The babe is to be called Nancy. It is not the child of poverty or of shame, the parents having been lawfully married; but for reasons not necessary to give, they choose to



part with it. You may adopt it without fear that it will ever be reclaimed."

"We will, will we not, George?" said Mrs. Clemmens, looking up entreatingly into her husband's face.

"Yes, wife," he said, tenderly. "I could not deny you anything now; and besides, my own heart yearns over the little creature, so helpless and friendless; and I think it looks very much like our own, so it shall fill her place. And why need any one know that it is not ours, being so near the same age, and coming to us so mysteriously?"

"Yes, why should they?" cried his wife, catching eagerly at the idea.

"We would be so glad to have it thought by everybody, and to have her believe, too, that she is our own," said Mr. Clemmens. "Dr. Blake, and you, Mrs. Croft, you will keep the secret, will you not?"

After a moment's consideration, the doctor pledged himself never to divulge the matter, unless it should be for the child's advantage. "I make this reservation," said he, "because it is possible she may have been stolen from her parents; and I cannot bind myself not to assist them in recovering her, if I learn that such is the case."

"Oh, no, certainly not," said Mrs. Clemmens, with a sigh. "It is so dreadful for a mother to lose her child."

"Or for a father," added her husband; "and hard as it would be to give the darling up, after we had learned to love it as our own, we could not refuse if the real parent asked for it; so that you are promising all we could ask, doctor."

"And I make the same promise with the same reservation," said Mrs. Croft.

"Thank you both," said Mr. Clemmens. "And now I will call Kizzie. We could hardly keep it from her; and I know she is trustworthy."

Kezia was still sitting on the porch in the fading light, anxiously awaiting further news from the sick-room. She

answered the summons promptly, and was at once shown the two infants, and made acquainted with the desires and intentions of the farmer and his wife. Great were her surprise and curiosity in regard to the foundling; and scarcely less was her satisfaction in its coming to fill the void in Mrs. Clemmens' heart made by the loss of her own little one.

"Surely the Lord sent the little creature to comfort you and all of us, Mrs. Clemmens," she said, bending over it as it lay in Mrs. Croft's lap; "and it's a little darling, it is—a real beauty! How on earth could its unnatural mother have the heart to give it up? Yes; I'll keep the secret, you may depend. But what's this, Mrs. Croft?"

She pushed aside the delicately-embroidered blanket of fine soft flannel that was wrapped like a shawl about the infant, and the light of the lamp shone on some glittering object. It was a coral armlet, that looped up the sleeve, and was fastened with a richly-chased clasp of the finest gold.

"Ah, that may tell us something!" exclaimed Mrs. Croft, hastily undoing the clasp. "Will you look if there's a name on it, doctor? I can't see without my specs."

The doctor took it and held it to the light, Mr. Clemmens and Kezia bending eagerly forward to examine it also, while the two ladies waited in almost breathless suspense.

"No; neither name nor initial."

The doctor's tone spoke some measure of disappointment and regret.

"Too bad!" said Kezia; "but let's see if there's anything else."

"Yes; here's a mate to that looping up the other sleeve," said Mrs. Croft. "And here, what's this? a handkerchief of the finest linen cambric, I should guess by the feel of it,—I can hardly see,—and trimmed with elegant lace." And she held it up as she spoke.

"Fine?" cried Kezia, catching hold of it; "I should think so! and here are letters in the corner, but e'en amost washed out. I've as keen sight as the next one, but could n't begin to say what they be."

The others scrutinized it in their turn, but with no better success.

“Let me see it and those armlets,” said Mrs. Clemmens, holding out her hand for them; “and then they must be laid away in a safe place. I shall lay away everything the babe has on, and keep them carefully. Mrs. Croft, will you please be so good as to change its clothes for some of my baby’s, and then fold the others and lay them in the bureau-drawer?”

“I will. I’ll attend to everything, if you’ll only quiet yourself, and try to go to sleep,” answered the kind neighbor.

“Yes; Mrs. Clemmens has had entirely too much excitement,” said the doctor; “and now I shall banish every one from the room but Mrs. Croft, and forbid even her to speak to my patient. She must have quiet and repose, or I can’t answer for the consequences.”

Mrs. Clemmens had been too much excited, and passed an almost sleepless night in consequence; though the little stranger made no disturbance. No prying neighbors were admitted to her room the next day, for she was much too ill to see any one but her husband, Mrs. Croft, who performed the part of nurse, and the doctor. This made it easy to conceal the death of her own infant, and the substitution of the other for it. Mr. Clemmens and the doctor buried the tiny corpse that night; and the secret was kept from all outsiders; even from Abner, who never suspected that the little one who from that day became the household pet was not she who was born beneath that roof.

They called her Nina; Mrs. Clemmens having a particular fancy to that name, and a special dislike to Nancy. The child was very beautiful in face and form; in disposition quick-tempered and somewhat wilful, but warm-hearted, generous, and affectionate; and never were parents more dotingly fond of an own and only child than Mr. and Mrs. Clemmens of her. He showed his affection by unlimited petting and indulgence; but the mother, with truer kindness, ruled her gently but firmly; gladly gratifying every reasonable desire

as far as lay in her power, but steadily denying her when certain that it was for her good ; and Nina, loving her father very dearly, yet clung with still more ardent devotion to her mother.

Up to Nina's tenth year scarcely a cloud obscured the brightness of her sky ; but about that time Mrs. Clemmens' health began to fail ; and it soon became evident to her neighbors and friends that she was going into a decline. Her husband alone resolutely shut his eyes to the danger ; while Nina, too young to know anything about it, was still gay and happy in the firm persuasion that "the doctor would soon make mamma well again."

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### CHAPTER III.

#### FOREBODINGS.

ONE bright summer afternoon, Mrs. Clemmens was reclining upon a couch in her pleasant sitting-room. She looked very delicate and fragile, and very pale, except that a bright red spot burned on each sunken cheek. She had a book in her hand, but was not reading ; and there was a very mournful expression in her large blue eyes, which rested thoughtfully upon the carpet.

But a light step sounded on the porch without ; a ripple of childish laughter and a merry warble of a few bird-like notes of song floated in on the breeze, as it came through the window laden with the perfume of heliotrope and mignonette ; and she looked up with a bright, glad smile as Nina bounded in through the open door.

"Oh, mamma, see ! I am at the head of my class, and have brought home the medal," cried the child, holding it up. "Aren't you glad ? aren't you proud of your little daughter ?"

"Yes, darling, that I am," said Mrs. Clemmens, smiling lovingly at the bright young face.

"That's a dear mamma; I knew you would be!" said Nina, springing to her mother's side, twining her arms round her neck, and kissing her over and over again.

"How hot your cheeks are, mamma, dear," she exclaimed. "Oh, I wish you could get well! I'm sure Dr. Blake ought to have cured you before this, if he was a real good doctor."

"He is, dearest. I would sooner trust to him than to anybody else," Mrs. Clemmens answered, gently, as she smoothed back the clustering ringlets from her darling's fair brow.

"Then he must make you well. I want you to be able to take nice long walks with me again; it's such a long, long while since we had one together. And you know, mamma, that you promised I should have a new white dress as soon as you could get into town to choose it for me."

"Yes, dear, and so you shall. But see, you have thrown your hat on the floor. Put it in its place, my pet. You must try to learn to be neat and orderly now, for your mother can no longer go after you to pick up your things."

"I will, mamma. I don't want to vex you, or give you trouble," said the little girl, affectionately, as she stooped to pick up the hat she had carelessly thrown off on her entrance; "and I'll try my best to break myself of my slovenly habits."

"That's right, my Nina; try to cure yourself of all your faults, for other folks may not have as much patience with you as your mother has," said Mrs. Clemmens, with a sadness in her tones that struck the child as strange and uncalled for.

"Well, mamma, who cares if they have n't, as long as you love me?" she answered, gayly, as she tripped out of the room.

"Poor darling! she little guesses what is before her," sighed the invalid, a tear rolling silently down her wasted cheek. "She little thinks how soon she will need a black dress, and will pine in vain for a mother's forbearing love

and tender care. Comfort would have no patience with her heedlessness and untidy ways, but would treat them as though they were far worse than more serious faults. Yet why should I allow that thought to trouble me? George will never send her away from him; and Kizzie will keep house and look after her till — but oh, I can't bear to think of that!" And again the tears rolled down her cheeks.

She let them have their way for a moment, but hastily removed the traces of them and put on a cheerful look, as she heard Nina returning.

"Mamma," said the little girl, "Kizzie is making waffles for supper. I hope you will be able to eat some."

"I think I shall, dear," Mrs. Clemmens answered, with a smile. "But my pet has forgotten to make herself neat. Go smooth your hair and wash your hands, and put on a clean apron, and then you may sit here and read to me till papa comes in from the field."

"There, what a naughty girl I am!" exclaimed the child. "I meant to do it as much as could be; but seeing Kizzie making the waffles put it all out of my head."

When Mr. Clemmens came in from his work, he found Nina reading aloud beside her mother's couch.

"That's right, my pet; and you are a first-rate little reader," he said, bending down to kiss the child and stroke her hair.

Then seating himself, he took her on his knee, while he talked in a cheerful strain to his wife, telling her he had never had finer crops, and promising her a new silk dress as soon as she was well enough to go to the store to choose it.

She thanked him with a mournful smile; and Nina clapped her hands, exclaiming, joyfully, "Oh, I'm so glad; and, mamma, you can buy my white dress at the same time."

Then the supper-bell rang, and Mr. Clemmens gave his wife the support of his arm as they went out to the dining-room.

"You seem weak to-day, Esther," he remarked. "The

doctor ought to give you some kind of tonic to strengthen you. I believe I'll go over this evening and talk to him about it."

"No; it is not worth while," she answered. "He was here this morning, and left me some medicine; and perhaps I will feel better to-morrow."

She exerted herself after that to appear as well as possible, and seemed very bright and cheerful all the evening, until Nina's bedtime came. She strained the child to her heart for a moment, as she fondly kissed her good-night, and followed the little figure with a look of yearning affection as it flitted across the room and disappeared through the doorway.

"Oh, my darling, my darling!" she murmured in low, quivering tones; "how can I bear to leave you in this cold world, without a mother's love to shield and comfort you!"

"What is that you are saying, Esther?" asked her husband, leaning over her.

"Oh, George!" she cried, with sudden energy; "if ever you let a stepmother abuse that child, I'll haunt you!"

"A stepmother, Esther?" he said, with a forced laugh; "why, how strangely you are talking! You must have a fit of the blues to-night! You are n't going to give me a chance to marry a second time."

There was an expression of keen anguish in the eyes she lifted to his face; and, much moved, he put his arms about her, and laying her head against his broad breast, kissed her tenderly.

"O George, how I love you!" she cried, putting her arm around his neck. "Oh, my dear, dear husband, must I leave you?"

"No, Esther! no, no; you shall not!" he answered, in trembling tones; "your case is not so bad as that yet. It's this terrible hot weather that weakens you so; and you'll be all right again by-and-by, when it gets cooler."

She shook her head mournfully. "No, dear George; I shall never be well again. I'm growing weaker all the

time ; and though it breaks my heart to think of leaving you and Nina, I know I must. I made Dr. Blake tell me the truth this morning. He did n't want to : he tried his best to put me off ; but I told him I would not be deceived any longer — he must tell me just what he thought of my case."

"And what did he say?" asked her husband, vainly trying to speak calmly.

The words came low and gaspingly as she answered : "That — that — I could not live more than six months, and — might not last as many weeks."

A half-suppressed groan burst from her husband's lips, and his breast heaved with emotion, while his arms tightened their clasp about her slender form, as if he would defy even the king of terrors to snatch her from him.

"Oh, George!" she sighed ; "if love could keep me, I know I should be safe ; but alas, it cannot ! and shudder and tremble as I may at the thought of the dark, cold grave, it will soon close over me ; and I am filled with horror and fear at the dismal prospect. Oh ! if I could but escape it ! if you could only save me from it !" And she clung to him with bitter weeping.

"Oh, Esther, darling, don't talk so !" he said, his voice almost inaudible from emotion. "I can't bear it. You shall not die ! I will have other advice, and we shall soon see you as well and strong as ever."

"No, George. I wish I could hope so ; but I feel that Dr. Blake is right, and that my days are numbered."

"Dr. Blake has no business to put such notions into your head !" he exclaimed, bitterly ; "he might have known it would do you an injury to fill your mind with such melancholy thoughts."

"No, George ; you are wrong to blame the doctor, because I insisted upon knowing all the truth ; for if I am to take that awful journey so soon, I ought to be trying to prepare for it. Oh, if I only knew how ! if I could only feel as Alice Griswold did when she lay on her death-bed ! She was



so happy, and said she was not at all afraid — death was only going home to be with Him she loved far better than all earthly friends. But to me, it is like taking a fearful leap in the dark, not knowing how dreadful may be my fall, or where I shall find myself when I reach the bottom."

"I'm sure you have no need to fear, Esther," said her husband, tenderly. "You have been the best of wives and mothers, the best of neighbors and mistresses, a good daughter and a good sister. You've done your duty in your station in life, and what more could be required of you?"

"Yes, I've tried to do my duty," she replied; "but I have n't always succeeded; and as I look back, I can remember that I've done and said things very often that I ought not to."

"Perhaps so: but God is merciful; and there are plenty of people who make greater professions and do much worse."

"I used to comfort myself, and quiet my conscience, with that thought," she sighed; "but if I've not been good enough, I'm afraid it won't make my case any better than some others have done worse; and oh, George, one wants something stronger than a maybe-so to trust to when death stares one in the face!"

"Ah, well, try to put away these gloomy thoughts, for they are only making you worse," he said, caressing her tenderly. "You will feel brighter and better to-morrow; and if you can only keep up your spirits, you may outlive me yet."

"I don't want to, George," she cried, clinging to him, and looking up with sad fondness into his face. "I would we might pass many more happy years together; but I could not bear to have you taken first — life would be too, too dreary without you, dearest."

"There, there; we will have no more gloomy talk," he said, assuming a cheerfulness he was far from feeling. "We are both tired, and will both feel better and brighter after a good night's rest. Why, to-morrow, we'll be ready to laugh

heartily at the folly we've been guilty of to-night in torturing ourselves with looking forward to troubles that may never come." He concluded with a laugh; but it sounded forced and unnatural, for his heart was very heavy.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### AN UNEXPECTED BLOW.

MRS. CLEMMENS was looking better in the morning, and after taking her cup of coffee, seemed to feel much stronger and more cheerful than on the previous day. Her husband remarked it with pleasure; and as he left her to go to his work, bade her be careful not to over-exert herself, and not to indulge in gloomy thoughts, but to amuse herself with some cheerful story-book.

"She need n't do a turn," said Kezia, who happened to be within earshot; "there is n't a bit more work on hand than I can do just as well as not."

"You're a jewel of a girl, Kizzie, — worth your weight in gold," said Mr. Clemmens, as he hurried away. He felt that he had not a moment to lose, for his men were threshing, and he was having his barn newly roofed in.

Kezia was dishing up the dinner, when Abner suddenly appeared before her, pale and trembling with agitation.

"What is it? what's the matter?" she cried, letting fall the fork with which she was trying her potatoes.

"He — he's dead; fell from the roof of the barn; and when we picked him up, there was n't no life left in him," he answered, hoarsely, dropping into a chair as he spoke.

"Who? What? You don't mean Mr. Clemmens?" gasped Kezia, staggering back and leaning against the wall, trembling in every limb.

Abner nodded. "It's awful!" he said, in a half-whisper; "but they're bringing him in, and — and you'll have to tell her, Kizzie."

"I can't!" she groaned, hiding her face in her hands.

"Oh, it'll kill her, it will, as sure as I'm alive!"

"But they're a-coming, I tell you; they're a'most here; and you'll *have* to tell her. 'T will be worse for her, if it comes on her all of a sudden."

"'T will be awful sudden, anyhow," Kezia answered, shuddering, and wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. "But I'll do it. I'll break it to her as easy as I can, though I'd rather, ten times over, march right up to the cannon's mouth. But run for the doctor, Abner! run as fast as ever you can! Maybe he's not dead after all, but only stunned; for what can fellows like you, and the rest out there, tell about such things? Go, go be off, I tell you, and run every step o' the way!"

"Sam Miller's gone after him: he ran right off the minute it happened," said Abner. "But it's no use, I know it's no use," he added, sighing and shaking his head.

"What's the matter, Kizzie? Oh, what is the matter? Abner, what is it?" asked a faint, tremulous voice; and they turned to find Mrs. Clemmens standing in the doorway, looking inquiringly from one to the other, while her pale, quivering lips and ashen cheek told that she already suspected that some terrible calamity had befallen her. "Tell me, tell me at once! don't try to hide anything from me!" she said, seeing that they hesitated to answer her. "Is my husband hurt?"

"Yes, ma'am; he got a fall, a right bad fall," said Abner; "fact is, he's a good bit hurt, and they're fetching him in. There they are now!" he added, as at that instant the feet of the men were heard upon the porch without.

Mrs. Clemmens was one of those brave, heroic spirits which, instead of sinking beneath a sudden shock, gather up all their strength to meet it with calmness and fortitude. She

neither shrieked nor fainted at the sight of him who was so dear to her, as he was borne in pale and unconscious, but calmly gave directions where they should lay him, and what should be done for his relief; for she thought he had only fainted—there was no bleeding; and broken bones and bruises were all that suggested themselves to her mind at that moment as probable; she would not allow herself to think of death—death to him who had left her side in sound health and all the strength of a vigorous manhood but a few hours ago.

“Carry him right in here, and lay him on the bed,” she directed, preceding them, and throwing open the door of the room in which we first made her acquaintance. “Abner, a basin of cold water! Kizzie, salts and vinegar, as quick as you can! Oh, doctor, are you here? how glad I am!”

For at that instant Dr. Blake and Sam Miller came hurrying in through the front entrance.

“Yes, Mrs. Clemmens; don’t be alarmed; it’s a sad accident, but we’ll see what can be done,” he answered, in a kindly, reassuring tone, as he stepped to the side of the bed where the men had just deposited their burden.

They moved out of his way and stood silently by, with uncovered heads, waiting for the physician’s verdict.

He glanced at the face, laid his finger on the pulse, and his countenance changed.

“What—what is it, doctor?” gasped the wife; “do—do you fear serious injury? Oh, do something at once! Would bleeding? Would—”

“There is nothing to do, nothing that can be done, my dear Mrs. Clemmens,” he said, in a deeply compassionate tone; “the shock of the fall must have been instantly fatal.”

She had borne up as long as she thought there was need of exertion, but at these dread words strength and consciousness forsook her, and she fell down in a deep, death-like swoon. Dr. Blake caught her in his arms, and bore her to the couch in the sitting-room, the sobbing Kizzie following with the salts and vinegar.

“Here’s what you want, doctor,” she said; “she called for ’em for him, but he’s past wantin’ ’em.”

“Yes, he’ll never want anything more in this world,” muttered the doctor; “and she’ll not be long following him. Throw open that window there, Kizzie, and let us give her all the air we can.”

“There’s Nina a-coming in from school, merry and happy as a cricket, as usual,” she said, coming back to his side.

“Quick, keep her out of here!” he answered, in a hasty, imperative tone. “Break the thing to her as gently as you can; and don’t let her see her mother till the first shock is over.”

Kezia was barely in time. The child was already in the hall when she opened the sitting-room door.

“How’s mamma?” she asked, springing gayly forward.

“The doctor’s with her just now,” said Kezia, trying to speak carelessly; “and if you’ll come into the kitchen for a minute, I’ve got something to tell you.”

“What?” asked the child, tripping after her. “Has papa come in yet?”

Kizzie could not speak, and kept her face out of sight, while replenishing her fire and examining into the condition of the contents of her pots and pans.

Nina waited a moment, then repeated her question somewhat impatiently.

Kezia turned suddenly, caught her in her arms, and strained her to her bosom, sobbing and crying like a child.

“Why, Kizzie, are you crazy?” asked the little girl. “What in the world can ail you? Oh, has anything happened to mamma?”

Her tones grew wild with alarm, and she struggled to free herself.

“Darlin’, you must n’t go to her now,” sobbed Kezia. “The doctor said I must keep you out for a bit, till — but oh, how shall I ever tell you? ’t will break your little heart!”

The child’s face grew deadly pale, and she compressed her

lips firmly. "Kizzie, tell me at once; I must know it all this minute," she said, in a strange, unnatural voice. "What's the matter? is — is mamma — very — very sick?"

"She was in a faint when I came out," said Kezia, desperately, seeing that the sad truth could be no longer withheld; "but I hope she's over it by this time. But — but your father's had an awful fall from the barn-roof; and — and — oh, I can't tell it! I can't tell it, nohow! Child, child, he's dead, dead, dead!" and she hid her face on Nina's neck, and sobbed aloud.

"He is n't! I won't have it so! Kizzie, you sha'n't say such things! My own dear papa dead? No, indeed! it a'n't true, and you know it a'n't! Just let me go, I say, let me go this minute, that I may run and find him!" cried the child, in piercing tones, while she struggled hard to free herself from Kizzie's detaining arms.

"Oh, hush, hush, darlin', do hush! your mamma will hear you; and — and 'twill go nigh to break her heart; if that isn't done a 'ready."

"Oh, I can't bear it, I can't bear it!" sobbed the little girl, clinging about her neck. "Take me to mamma now."

"Take a good cry first, dear; cry it all out in my arms, and ease your poor heart a bit," said Kezia, tenderly; "and when you've grown calm and quiet-like, I think the doctor will let you go to her."

It was no easy task to restrain the warm-hearted, impetuous child from rushing away in search of both the dead and the living parent; and seeing that the men were waiting for their dinner, Kezia was obliged to put her down in order to set it on the table. She had scarcely turned her back when Nina was gone, and the next moment heart-rending cries were heard coming from the room where the body lay.

"There, the mischief's done! I knew 't would be just so!" cried Kizzie, setting down the plate of meat she had in her hand, and hurrying to the rescue. "Poor child! poor child! But I must stop that, or she'll break her mother's heart."

Mrs. Clemmens' swoon had proved an unusually long one, and Nina's cries were the first thing that roused her. She sighed, opened her eyes, and started up, exclaiming, "Oh, my darling! What ails her? Ah, I remember! Oh, George, George!"

She dropped her face into her hands with a burst of agonized weeping.

"My poor friend, I am glad to see you weep, for tears will do you good," said the doctor, gently.

She gave a silent assent; then, in a voice choked with sobs, begged him to bring Nina to her, that they might weep together.

He found the child clinging to the corpse, and Kizzie vainly trying to persuade her to leave it.

"I will not! I will not!" she sobbed; "he's my own papa; and they'll be taking him away if I leave him. No, I will hold him fast."

"No, my poor child, they will not take him away for several days," said Dr. Blake, laying his hand tenderly on her head; "so you need n't be afraid to come away from him now; and if you will promise to be quiet, and not hurt your dear mother with cries and screams, I will take you to her."

"Will you, doctor? Then I will try to be as good and quiet as ever I can," sobbed the child, slipping off the bed and putting her little hand into his, at the same time making a great effort to control herself.

"There! that is my little woman," he said, stroking her hair caressingly. "I was sure you loved mother too well to want to hurt her."

"Love her? I guess she does!" muttered Kizzie, hurrying back to the kitchen, while Dr. Blake led the little girl to her mother, and left them weeping in each other's arms.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE ARRIVAL.

TWO weeks later Mrs. Clemmens was seated in her easy-chair by the sitting-room window, while Nina hovered about her, trying by every affectionate art to cheer and comfort her. She had failed rapidly since her husband's death; yet the child still hoped soon to see her well again.

There was a sound of wheels stopping at the gate, and the invalid started up with a low cry of mingled excitement, joy, and grief; but fell back again panting for breath.

Abner had been dispatched to the village, an hour before, to meet the train from New York, which was to bring Mrs. Powell,—Mrs. Clemmens' sister and only near living relative. Her home was in Philadelphia, and the sisters had not met since a year or two before Nina's birth.

"They have come," said the child, glancing from the window; "but, mamma, dear, don't try to go out to meet Aunt Comfort: you are not able. I will go and welcome her, and bring her in;" and, tenderly kissing the wasted cheek, she hurried from the room.

As she ran out upon the porch, Abner was just opening the gate for Mrs. Powell, who stepped in; then turning round bade him take her trunk from the buggy and carry it into the house.

"Yes, ma'am; I'll attend to it," he answered.

"But do so at once; I must see it brought in. I believe in attending to things myself, and then I'm sure of having them right," she said, with an unpleasant assumption of authority which Abner did not at all relish.

"Then I've a great mind to let you carry it in yourself," he muttered, as he proceeded to lift the trunk down, while she stood watching him.



“How do you do, Aunt Comfort? You are welcome to Oakdale,” said Nina, in her pleasant, childish voice, as at this moment she reached Mrs. Powell’s side. “I am Nina, you know; mamma is too sick and weak to come out to meet you, and so I have come instead. Will you walk in? Mamma is longing to see you; and Abner will take care of your trunk.”

“So you are Nina? How do you do, child? I had no idea your mother was so ill.”

A cold, formal kiss, and a keen, searching look out of a pair of sharp, black eyes accompanied the words, which, though spoken in a milder key than those addressed to Abner, grated harshly on the ears accustomed to the gentle, affectionate tones of Mrs. Clemmens’ voice, and the hearty, cheery ones of Kezia. Even Abner’s gruff way of speaking was far more agreeable; and the impulsive Nina, with her sensitive nature and strong feelings, instantly decided in her own mind that Aunt Comfort was not a person to be loved, but entirely the reverse,—“not one bit like mamma,”—and that the sooner she went away again, the better.

“I will see my trunk taken in first,” continued Mrs. Powell, stepping aside out of Abner’s way, as he came in with it on his shoulder.

“Shall I carry your basket, aunt?” asked Nina, holding out her hand for it.

“Yes; but carry it carefully. I don’t want the contents jumbled up together; and you may as well take the shawl, too,” replied Mrs. Powell, giving her both, without a word of thanks for her proffered assistance, which omission was noticed and duly resented by Nina, who could not remember ever failing to receive her mother’s thanks for even the smallest service rendered or offered to her. Her dark eyes flashed, and her lip curled with scorn, as she followed Mrs. Powell, who kept close behind Abner and the trunk.

“Where is it to go? which room am I to occupy?” she asked, turning to Nina, as they reached the hall-door.

“The best bed-room — the company-room, up-stairs, over the parlor,” said the little girl. Abner walked on up the stairs with his burden, Mrs. Powell seeming more than half inclined to follow him.

But the door of the sitting-room was open, and a pale, white-robed figure, starting up from an arm-chair by the window, tottered forward to meet her.

“Why, Esther, how you are altered!” exclaimed Mrs. Powell, stepping quickly toward her sister, and opening her arms to receive her.

“Oh, Comfort, my sister! you’ve come at last!” sobbed Mrs. Clemmens, throwing herself upon her sister’s bosom, and clinging about her neck: “I’ve wanted you so since—”

“Yes, I know; I ought to have come sooner,” returned Mrs. Powell, betraying some emotion in her tone; “but really, there were so many arrangements to make about the children, and the house, and Mr. Powell, too, that it’s a wonder I got off when I did.”

“Yes; it was very kind in you, Comfort,” sighed Mrs. Clemmens, in a voice so low and feeble that her sister started with surprise and alarm, saying, hastily, “Let me help you to the couch, Esther; you are not fit to stand, or hardly to sit up, I should think.”

Nina had set the basket down carefully, laid the shawl with equal care over a chair-back, and now ran to assist in placing her mother comfortably on the pillows.

“Don’t cry so, dear, dear mamma; because you know it always hurts you and makes you weaker,” she said tenderly, while the big tears were chasing each other fast down her own cheeks.

“I will try to stop, darling,” whispered Mrs. Clemmens, as the child leaned over her, striving to soothe and console her with the fondest caresses.

“Shall I bring you your drops, mamma?” asked the little girl.

“Not now, dear. Comfort,” and she turned to Mrs. Powell, “come and sit down close by my side.”

“This is my Nina, Comfort, my darling only child, whom I have mentioned so often in my letters to you. I want you to love one another,” she added, with almost feverish earnestness, taking the little girl’s hand and putting it into her sister’s. “You must, indeed you must, for my sake. I cannot have it otherwise.”

“It would be very unnatural not to love my only sister’s only child,” said Mrs. Powell, drawing Nina to her, and giving her another of her cold, formal kisses, from which the child could scarcely refrain from shrinking in evident disgust. But she had a strong will; and love for her mother made her control herself and receive it passively; though her naturally candid nature, scorning everything like deceit and hypocrisy, would have led her to show openly her loathing of the caress.

“Would you like to go to your room now, sister?” asked Mrs. Clemmens. “Nina will show you the way, and get anything for you that you may want.”

“I can find my way; and you may need her,” said Mrs. Powell, rising. “It’s the room I had when I was here before, is n’t it?”

“Yes; but let Nina go with you: they may have forgotten something that you will want. Nina, dear, carry Aunt Comfort’s basket for her.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Nina, moving to obey.

“No, I will carry it,” said Mrs. Powell, preventing her; “but you may take the shawl; only be careful not to trail it on the floor.”

“Perhaps you’d better not trust me with it, Aunt Comfort; I’m very careless sometimes,” said the little girl, smiling, and shrugging her shoulders.

“Then it is time to teach you better,” replied Mrs. Powell, folding the shawl and laying it over the child’s arm. “Now go on before me, and let me see how nicely you can carry it.”

Nina’s eyes flashed, and, but for an entreating look from her mother, she would have thrown the shawl down and refused to carry it; for her high spirit rebelled at the assumption of

authority apparent in Mrs. Powell's words, and still more in her tone and manner.

"She orders me about, and reproves me, as nobody but mamma has a right to do; and she has begun it very soon, too," thought the child, as she silently led the way to the room prepared for the guest.

It was very neat and tastefully arranged. Kezia had spared no pains upon it, and had said a good deal about Mrs. Powell's exceeding particularity.

As they entered, the latter sent a sharp, searching glance all around; and Nina noticed it with a resentful feeling, thinking to herself, "She's trying to find some dust or dirt, or something out of its place."

"Ah, there is my trunk," she said, "set down in the very most inconvenient spot, of course. Nina, you may go down to the kitchen, and send that stupid fellow up to move it for me."

"We have n't any stupid fellow about the place that I know of," replied Nina, in a tone that left Mrs. Powell uncertain whether her remark was meant for impertinence, or was made from pure simplicity.

She turned and gave the little girl a keen look out of her cold, black eyes, saying: "One would think you might be supposed to belong to that class yourself. Go down and tell Abner that I want him."

Kezia was very busy in the kitchen frying chickens and baking waffles, and had hardly time to so much as give Abner a look as he came in from putting away the buggy and attending to his horse.

"I tell you what, Kizzie," said he, seating himself with a long-drawn sigh, "I don't want to see any more o' that woman than I'm obleeged to. If I'd known the sort she was, I guess she might have stayed at the depot, or walked out here, whichever she pleased, for all me."

"Oh, now, Abner, you need n't talk that way," rejoined Kizzie, turning her waffle-iron; "you'd do a sight more'n that to please Mrs. Clemmens, I know."

“Well, yes, Kizzie, so I would: I’d do a’ most anything for her; but I can’t think it will add to anybody’s comfort or happiness to have that — woman — she *a’n’t a lady* — ’round. Don’t let her look into your dairy: she’d sour the milk quicker ’n any thunderstorm, or my name’s not Abner Huff.”

“Come, come; now don’t be too hard on her: she has her good qualities as well as other folks,” said Kezia, good-naturedly.

“I have n’t found ’em out yet,” grunted Abner.

“No: how should you, when you have n’t spent an hour in her company? But I knew her some years back; and I can tell you there’s not a more industrious and saving person to be found; nor a neater one, either.”

“Abner,” said Nina, coming in at that moment, looking flushed and angry, “you’re wanted up-stairs to move that trunk into a better place. Aunt Comfort says you’ve put it into the very most inconvenient spot that you could find.”

“Very well: she can move it herself, if she’s a mind to. I’m no slave, to come and go at her bidding.”

“Come, now, Abner,” said Kizzie, soothingly, “behave like a gentleman. She’s a woman, you know; and I s’pose the trunk’s heavy for her to move; and you’re a big, strong man.”

He made no answer; but, looking at Nina, asked, with a leer, “Well, how do like your aunt?”

“I don’t like her at all!” cried the little girl, vehemently, half stamping her foot as she spoke: “she is n’t a bit like mamma; no, not one single bit; and I wish she’d go away to-morrow.”

“Why, Nina!” exclaimed Kezia, in surprise, while Abner burst into a loud laugh; and the child turned about and ran away.

“Did I ever!” cried Kezia, looking after her. “My, but that child has got a temper of her own! Oh, dear, dear! to

think she's likely to have to live with that woman, and has taken such a dislike to her already."

"Now, Kizzie, that had n't ought to be, no how at all," said Abner: "they're just the sort, them two, to torment each other half to death. I s'pose Mrs. Clemmens is n't long for this world; but can't you persuade her to put the child with somebody else, that would n't plague the life out of her?"

"I don't know what else can be done," said Kezia, shaking her head, and sighing. "But a'n't you a-going to go up and move that trunk?"

"No, not I; she may wait on herself. I'm off to feed the pigs, and fetch the cows from pasture." And he walked away, whistling "Yankee Doodle."

"That tune stands for independence," soliloquized Kezia, going on with her culinary labors. "Well, well! it's Mrs. Powell's own fault, for Abner's as ready as the next one to wait on them that treat him decent."

From the kitchen Nina went straight to the sitting-room, and took her usual seat on a stool beside her mother's couch.

"What has gone wrong with my darling?" asked the feeble voice of the invalid, as, with her thin, white hand, she tenderly smoothed back the curls from the flushed face.

"Never mind, mamma; it was just that Aunt Comfort speaks so—so—in a way I don't like; but I'll try not to mind it any more, for your sake," said the little girl, leaning her rosy cheek against the pillow, and looking fondly into her mother's eyes.

"My darling, my poor darling!" she murmured.

"Why, mamma? why do you call me that?" Nina asked, with an inquiring look.

"The world is full of trouble, dearest, and you cannot escape your share," Mrs. Clemmens answered, evasively.

Kizzie had just announced that her supper was ready and on the table, when Mrs. Powell came down, looking cold and severe, and asking, in an injured tone, "Why did you not do as I requested, Nina, and send up Abner to move my trunk?"

Nina thought it had been an order rather than a request; but only answered that she had told Abner, and supposed he had gone up to do it.

“Why, I am surprised at Abner,” said Mrs. Clemmens, apologetically: “he is always very obliging to me. But, please excuse him, sister. I suppose he had something else to do which he imagined ought to be attended to first. I will have him go up and move it after supper.”

“No, thank you, Esther; I have done it myself,” replied Mrs. Powell, stiffly.

“Ah! I am sorry,” said Mrs. Clemmens, slowly rising from her couch, and leaning on Nina for support; “but let us have our supper now; you must be hungry after your journey, sister.”

“Yes, rather; quite enough so to enjoy Kizzie’s good cookery,” replied Mrs. Powell, in a mollified tone; and, giving her arm to her sister, “Lean on me,” she said; “Nina is hardly tall enough or strong enough to give you much support.”

They took their seats at the table, and Mrs. Clemmens inquired, “How do you like your tea, sister? with cream and sugar?”

But a look of mingled surprise and reproof from Mrs. Powell called a blush to her wasted cheek; and, dropping her hands in her lap, she murmured, “Excuse me; I forgot your ways.”

Whereupon Mrs. Powell, bending low over her plate, said a very long grace, which Nina listened to with some impatience, thinking the waffles and chicken would be quite cold.

## CHAPTER VI.

“COMFORT” CAUSES MUCH DISCOMFORT.

ESTHER, have you got religion? Do you belong to the church?”

The question was so abrupt, so unexpected, that Mrs. Clemmens started and colored deeply, and Nina felt the hand she was holding tremble in hers.

They had just come in from the supper-table, and Mrs. Clemmens, quite exhausted with the exertion she had made, was lying panting on her couch.

“Nina, dear,” she said, in a half-whisper, “suppose you go out and wipe the dishes for Kizzie: she has had so much to do to-day; and mamma can spare you a little while, now that auntie is here.”

Nina understood that her mother would rather not have her hear what Mrs. Powell was about to say; and she rose at once, and went without the slightest objection, but longing to send “Aunt Comfort away instead, to keep her from worrying poor mamma, who was quite good enough, she was sure, if she did n’t belong to the church.”

There was silence for a moment after the little girl had left the room, and then Mrs. Powell repeated her question in a solemn, sepulchral voice.

“I have never joined the church, Comfort,” replied Mrs. Clemmens, speaking low and faintly; “as to getting religion—I hardly know what you mean by it.”

“Not know what it is to get religion! Oh, Esther, is it possible?” cried Mrs. Powell, lifting her hands in holy horror, and finishing her sentence with a deep-drawn sigh.

“Why, to get religion is to repent and forsake your sins, and begin to serve God.”



"I don't know how," answered her sister, sadly.

"You must read the Bible, and pray. You must think over all you've said or done that was wrong, and try to feel sorry for it. You must get to feel that you're the greatest sinner that ever lived, and tell God so; and then you may hope to be forgiven."

"I can't; for I know there are plenty of people that have done far more wicked deeds than ever I did."

"But you must; you must feel as Paul did,—that you are the chief of sinners."

"Do you feel so about yourself, Comfort?"

"Well, no, not exactly: but you see it is different with me; for, of course, I was never a blasphemer and persecutor like Paul; and I joined the church before I was grown up, and I've been careful to live a Christian life ever since. I always read my Bible, and pray every night and morning, and would not think of eating a meal without asking a blessing; and unless I'm kept at home by sickness, I'm always in my place at church, rain or shine, Sundays, and weekdays, too. And that is the way you should have lived, Esther, and then you'd have had some comfort when you came to lie on a sick and probably dying bed. I feel it my duty to say it to you, Esther," she added, as her sister turned away her head with a bitter groan. "I can see you're far gone in consumption; and you ought to know that you've but little time left for securing your soul's salvation, that you may be diligent in attending to it." Her tone was kind, and she wept while she uttered the last few sentences.

"I know it, Comfort," sobbed her sister. "I made the doctor tell me the truth weeks ago; and I knew before my husband's accident that I was a dying woman."

"I can hardly bear to think of losing you, Esther,—the only sister I have," said Mrs. Powell; "and yet, if you had religion, it would be a happy change for you. I hope you'll try to get it."

"I can't think of anything but George, and my longing to

be with him, and of Nina, and how hard it is to leave her," said Mrs. Clemmens, sadly. "Oh, Comfort, be kind to my darling when I am gone! Love and cherish her for my sake!"

"Don't fret about her, Esther; I'll be a mother to her, and try to train her up in the way she should go. Of course, your child would be almost as near to me as my own."

"She's a dear, warm-hearted child, and easily ruled through her affections: she would do anything for those she loves," said Mrs. Clemmens; "but you cannot drive her one step. I know you will think me dreadfully wicked, Comfort; but I can't help feeling that it's very hard and cruel that my darling must lose both her parents so early in life: it makes me angry with God, and I can't love him. We were so happy together—we three; and I felt it was terribly hard when I found that I must go: but then I thought George would be left to care for Nina; and now he is gone; and she took his loss so hard. I don't know how she will ever bear it, when she knows that I must leave her, too. Oh, my darling! my darling!" she cried, with a burst of bitter weeping.

"I am very sorry for you, Esther, and for the child, too," said Mrs. Powell, in a tone of mingled sympathy and reproof; "but how can you be so wicked? Angry at God! Is it possible? I should think it would be easy enough for you to feel yourself the very chief of sinners. I'm sure God can't love you while you feel so. He is angry with the wicked every day; and he must be dreadfully angry with anybody that feels as you say you do."

"I suppose he is; but it does not make me love him to think so," sighed the invalid. "I love those who love me; and it is perfectly natural to me, and I think to others also, to hate, or at least dislike, where I know anger and aversion are felt toward me."

"Esther, you frighten me!" exclaimed her sister. "You must get rid of these wicked feelings. You must repent and turn to God, or you'll lose your soul. Promise me that you'll try to do so—that you'll try to feel right."

"I will try," she answered, in a sad, despairing tone; "but I fear I shall never succeed. I can't change my feelings, and you say God will not love me till I do. But I will read the Bible, and try to pray and to feel as I ought. There is Kizzie with the lamp; and you may read a chapter to me now, if you choose. I will listen, and try to profit."

"Poor, dear, darling mamma; how sorry and how sick you look!" whispered Nina, standing at her mother's side, and leaning over her with a fond caress. "May I stay and sit beside you now?"

"Yes, indeed, my darling, as close as you can get; and let me hold your hand in mine while Aunt Comfort reads to us," returned Mrs. Clemmens, in the same low and tender tone.

Mrs. Powell moved her chair nearer the light, opened a large, handsomely-bound Bible that lay on the table, and which appeared to have seen very little use, and began to read.

The passages she selected were full of the requirements and threatenings of the law, while she seemed studiously to avoid those that proclaim the glad tidings of a free salvation through the merits and intercession of a crucified and risen Saviour.

Mrs. Clemmens lay listening in silence and with a contracted brow, the look of hopeless sorrow deepening every moment upon her expressive countenance.

She slept little that night, — mental distress uniting with bodily to banish from her pillow the refreshing rest so much needed by her exhausted frame, — and morning found her even more unfit for exertion than on the previous day.

Several very wretched days followed, Mrs. Powell seizing upon every opportunity to repeat her well-meant, but ill-judged warnings and exhortations, and the poor, heart-broken sufferer finding it utterly impossible to obey. But at length a better counsellor was sent her, — one who spoke of a God of love, a Saviour who was the *friend of sinners*. She learned to love him, to trust her all in his hands, and death lost its terrors. She no longer clung to life, except for Nina's sake.

Still, the thought of the grief and desolation her darling

must suffer when she was gone, made her very sad at times. She knew the child's passionate love for her; and she could see that Mrs. Powell was not one to whom it could be readily, if ever, transferred, — their natures were not congenial; and while Nina's faults were just those which would clash most frequently with her aunt's peculiarities, they were of a kind to be extremely irritating to one of her disposition. The poor dying mother had to listen to frequent complaints from Mrs. Powell of her child's heedlessness, untidy ways, and quick temper, which she vainly tried to excuse; and to many an outpouring of Nina's grief and indignation at "Aunt Comfort's fault-finding, scolding, and ordering."

She tried to persuade each to love and forbearance toward the other; but was painfully conscious that her words had little effect upon either, and that her darling's future was likely to be one of severe trial. She then earnestly strove to lead her to Jesus, as a friend whose love and sympathy would never fail her; but Nina only answered that while she had the love of her "own dear, precious mamma," she cared for no other; and when a hint was given of the possibility that she might be taken from her, it was received with a burst of such bitter weeping, that Mrs. Clemmens felt it impossible to tell her the truth, and merely soothed her with caresses and tender words of love.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### SURPRISING DISCLOSURE.

**B**UT the end was drawing near, and Mrs. Clemmens felt that whatever she had to do must be done quickly. She shrank from revealing to her sister the secret connected with Nina's birth, and all the more as she perceived how slight was the hold the child had upon Mrs. Powell's affections. "Ah,

I fear Comfort will not care for my darling, when she learns that she is mine only by adoption," was her sorrowful reflection. Yet she felt that her sister ought not to be left in ignorance of facts of such importance in regard to Nina, — her knowledge of which might at some future day become necessary to the child's welfare; and she preferred that Comfort should learn them from her own lips, rather than from those of Mrs. Croft, Dr. Blake, or Kezia.

So, one bright, pleasant afternoon, she sent Nina on an errand to the house of a neighbor who lived at such a distance that she knew the child could not return under an hour or more.

Seated in her easy-chair by the window, she watched the little figure with a look of yearning tenderness till it was out of sight. Then turning to Mrs. Powell, "Sister," she said, "I am glad that we are left alone for a little while, because I have something of great importance to tell you. But, first, will you please call Kizzie to me for a moment?"

With a face full of surprise and curiosity, Mrs. Powell laid aside her work, rose from her seat, and did as requested.

"Kizzie," said Mrs. Clemmens, feebly, as Kezia's kindly face appeared in the doorway; "will you go to the closet in my room, please, and get me the little wooden box you will find far back on the topmost shelf, and also the key belonging to it, which is in the left-hand corner of the upper drawer of the bureau, under a pile of handkerchiefs?"

"Yes, ma'am, that I will," said Kizzie, moving away with alacrity to comply with the request of the mistress whom she loved so dearly that she would almost have laid down her life for her.

She returned in a moment, and, setting the box on a chair beside Mrs. Clemmens, handed her the key.

"Unlock it, Kizzie, please," she said, in a voice scarcely raised above a whisper; "and, if you have time, you may stay and help me out with my story. I have hardly breath enough to talk so much."

Kizzie did as requested ; and, at a sign from her sister, Mrs. Powell was about to raise the lid of the box and begin an examination of its contents, when Kezia laid her hand upon it, and, looking with affectionate concern at the pale, agitated face of the invalid, said, "Why should you distress yourself with this matter, Mrs. Clemmens? There 'll be three of us left yet, and that is enough to keep the secret for any time o' need there 'll be to use it. I see it 's dreadful tryin' to your feelin's ; so let me lock up the box again, and take care of it — or let one o' the others do it, it's all one to me — till it 's wanted ; if that time ever comes."

"No, Kizzie, thank you. I think my sister should be intrusted with the secret ; for when I am gone, she will be the one on whom Nina will have the strongest claim for love and care, — my darling's nearest and dearest friend, I hope."

"Of course ; the only near relative she will have left," said Mrs. Powell.

"Well, just as you please, Mrs. Clemmens," said Kezia, taking her hand from the box ; "'twas only to save your feelin's I spoke. But in regard to the love the child will get, I'm free to say that she 'll not find a warmer corner in any other body's heart than in mine."

"I'm sure of it, Kizzie: you've always loved her," Mrs. Clemmens answered, with emotion.

Mrs. Powell, who was by no means deficient in feminine curiosity, had already raised the lid of the box, and lifted from it a bundle carefully pinned up in a white towel. Laying it on her lap, she quickly removed the pins and unfolded the towel, uttering an exclamation of wonder and astonishment at the sight which then met her view, — a complete suit of baby-clothes of the finest materials ; the little dress richly embroidered and trimmed with costly lace, and the underclothing scarcely less beautiful or expensive.

"I never saw anything handsomer ; no, not even in Philadelphia !" she cried. "But they must have cost a great deal of money. Esther, I'm sure you could never have been so

extravagant, even for your first and only baby. But what's this underneath the baby-clothes? a lady's handkerchief, I declare! and as fine, and trimmed with as expensive lace, as the rest," she added, holding it up and examining it closely. "And here are letters in the corner; almost faded out, but I'm sure they're not yours. What does it all mean?" And she looked from her sister to Kezia and back again.

The latter did not speak. Mrs. Clemmens' only answer was a mute invitation to continue her examination of the box; and Mrs. Powell lifted out another bundle, wrapped like the first in a clean, white towel, and with a strong scent of camphor about it.

The contents were some little flannel skirts and an infant's blanket: all of silky-like softness, and heavily embroidered with white sewing-silk.

"Oh, these are beautiful!" she said. "I never saw flannel to equal this; and the embroidery is splendid."

"Here is something else; and that is all, except this bit o' paper," said Kezia, handing Mrs. Powell a folded scrap of letter-paper, and a tiny box, such as jewelry is often kept in.

Mrs. Powell opened the latter with eager haste, and again exclaimed with surprise.

It contained a pair of coral armlets with clasps of gold, the workmanship of which must have added largely to their cost.

"These are lovely!" she cried, "and must have cost a pretty penny, too. Pray, where *did* they and all these other things come from? Esther, I know you never had the money to buy them."

"Read what's on the paper," said Kezia, shortly, while Mrs. Clemmens merely closed her eyes, and turned away her head with a deep sigh.

As the reader is already aware of the contents of this paper, it is unnecessary to repeat them here.

Mrs. Powell read it out slowly and distinctly. Then letting it fall into her lap, "Ah, I see it all now," she said, in a sneering, sarcastic tone. "Nina is not your child, but a

foundling; and it is strange I had not suspected it before—many times as I have remarked her total lack of resemblance to either you or George in form, feature, complexion, or disposition; but I had confidence in your word, Esther, and could never have believed you capable of such deceit. That long string of falsehoods—I can't give them any milder name—about your joyful anticipations; and then the birth of your child, your illness at the time, and all that."

She paused for want of breath. Kezia was swelling with indignation, and Mrs. Clemmens' voice was low and full of tears as she answered:

"You wrong me, Comfort—me, your dying sister. I wrote you nothing but the truth; though a part of it I kept back, as I thought then, and still think, I had a right to do. I had a babe, and suffered greatly at the time, barely escaping with life; while it just breathed and died. Tell her the rest, Kizzie; I have no more breath."

Kezia finished the story in a few brief sentences; making it as short as she could for the invalid's sake, and not caring to gratify Mrs. Powell's curiosity more than was absolutely necessary. But that lady was not satisfied with so meagre an account, and proceeded to cross-question her till her patience was nearly exhausted.

"Well, I must say, it's all very strange," she said at last; "and, Esther, I beg your pardon for accusing you of falsehood; though I still think you might have taken me, your only sister, into your confidence. So Nina is not your own child! that must be a comfort now, as it cannot be so hard to leave her."

"Yes, she *is* my own: she was given to me; and I took her into my very heart of hearts from the first moment!" cried Mrs. Clemmens, in earnest, tearful tones. "I could not have loved the one that was bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh any better; and I cannot realize that she is not it,—the exchange was made so soon; and she has always been such a darling."



“How can you talk so, or feel so, Esther?” exclaimed her sister, in a tone of disgust. “You surely are not so silly as to believe the assertions of the writer of these lines. For my part, I have n’t a doubt that she’s the child of shame; for what other motive, except poverty—which evidently could have nothing to do with this case—would ever induce a parent to put away a child in such a heartless manner?”

“And how do you know that it was the parents? I will tell you what I think: that the mother died at the child’s birth; and that the father had died before, and some relation, who wanted to secure the property Nina was born to inherit, took that way to get rid of the little creature and her claim.”

“Quite worthy of your romantic imagination, Esther,” replied her sister, contemptuously; “but I am sure my theory is far more probable.”

“Well, Comfort, we can neither of us do more than conjecture,” said Mrs. Clemmens, with a sigh. “But even the certainty of what you suspect, could make no difference in my affection for my darling; nor would it have done so with George, as he himself assured me. And we have willed her all that we had to leave.”

She did not see the flush of anger and disappointment which these words called up to her sister’s face; for Mrs. Powell was seated so nearly behind her that it required something of an effort to bring her within her line of vision,—an effort which she had hardly strength to make.

Nor did Kezia see it; for she had gone back to her kitchen as soon as she found that her services were no longer required in the sitting-room.

“There is a copy of the will among my husband’s papers in the secretary yonder,” continued Mrs. Clemmens, in her low, feeble tones. “Come, sit close beside me, Comfort, till I tell you all about it.

“Mr. Lancaster, our lawyer, who lives in the village, has another copy. He and Dr. Blake are the executors, and will see to the renting of the farm; for it is not to be sold, but

kept for Nina. We have some money in the bank, and I think there will be enough left, after everything is settled up, to board and clothe Nina and pay her schooling until the first year's rent is due. You will have no trouble about these matters; for Mr. Lancaster and the doctor will manage them all; but, for my sake, sister, you will take my darling to your home, and be a mother to her, will you not?"

As she spoke, she took the hand of Mrs. Powell, who had complied with her request to come and sit close at her side, and looked entreatingly into her face.

"Yes, for your sake, Esther. I would do a great deal for your sake, sister," was the audible answer, accompanied by a slight caress; while the hidden thought was, "I know how to economize; and I dare say I can make it pay, and more too, perhaps."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Clemmens, gratefully. "The property is to belong to Nina while she lives, and to her children after her, should she have any; but should she die unmarried or childless, it is to go to you and your children."

"Esther," said Mrs. Powell, in a severely-virtuous tone, "you are treating me as I never would have treated you. I could never disinherit a sister for a stranger."

"A stranger! Oh, Comfort, how can you? Have I not just said that my darling could not be nearer or dearer to me were she my own flesh and blood? Besides, the will is my husband's, and I could not alter it if I would; nor would I, if I could."

Mrs. Powell bit her lips. "His relations are expected to be perfectly satisfied, I presume?"

"There are none near, and such as there are, are, as far as I know, able to take care of themselves," replied Mrs. Clemmens, wearily. "But at all events, having adopted Nina, and thus prevented some one else from doing so, we were bound to provide for her as we would for our own."

"And what if Nina turns out to be an heiress, and comes into such a property of her own that this small farm will be of little

consequence to her, while it would be quite a godsend to Mr. Powell and me, with our four children to feed, clothe, and educate?"

"Then I am sure Nina will do what is just and generous; for, though such a mere child, she is the soul of honor and generosity."

"Perfection in your eyes; but far from it in mine," thought Mrs. Powell. But she said nothing; and her sister went on, slowly, as she could gather strength to speak, giving directions about the household goods, furniture, bedding, &c. Some few things Mrs. Powell was to have; some were to be given to Kezia; but the most of such things as would keep were to be packed away in the garret till Nina came of age; for her mother was sure she would like to have them then because of their association with her happy childhood's home.

"And what is to be done with these?" asked Mrs. Powell, indicating the wooden box and the articles taken from it, which still lay in her lap.

"I commit them to your care, sister, to be restored to Nina, or her family, when the right time comes, of which you will, of course, be the judge. But believing, as I do, that it would be a great grief to the poor child to learn this secret now, I want it carefully concealed from her. Do not let her know it until she is grown up and married, unless something turns up respecting her relatives.

"And now will you please restore everything to the condition in which you found it, and lock the box and take possession of it and the key?"

With this request Mrs. Powell willingly complied, while her sister, greatly exhausted by the excitement she had gone through, and the effort of talking so much, laid her head back among the cushions of her chair, closed her eyes, and presently fell asleep.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## KIZZIE SPEAKS HER MIND.

MRS. CLEMMENS was gone. Sweetly and peacefully she had fallen asleep in Jesus, her last look of love resting upon Nina, her latest breath spent in commending her darling to her sister's tender care.

A few days before the blow came, Nina learned the sad truth, and her grief and despair were heart-rending to behold; yet, on being told that she was injuring her mother, she ceased her cries and sobs, forced her tears back to their fountain, and from that moment showed a determined self-control very surprising in one so young; waiting upon the invalid with a calm, quiet, tender solicitude that would have been worthy of all praise in a woman of thrice her years.

But when her loved task was done, and the dear one could no longer be pained by her tears and her bitter cries and moans, they burst forth with a violence proportioned to the restraint she had before put upon herself.

Dr. Blake, Mrs. Croft, and Kezia were deeply touched, and strove to soothe her with the tenderest sympathy and love; but silent endurance at first, then cold rebuke, were all that Mrs. Powell had to offer. She had never felt her heart warm toward Nina even while believing her to be her sister's own and only child; and from the moment of learning that such was not the fact, that the little girl's parentage was unknown, and that the property of her adopted parents had been bequeathed to her instead of to herself and her children, she had cherished for the child a feeling of indifference and contempt that amounted almost to aversion. She could scarce brook the thought that, by her sister's adoption of this nameless waif, she had missed coming into the inheritance of Oakdale farm,

the house and furniture, and all Mr. Clemmens' savings; and even while that sister yet lay in death's sleep in the parlor below, she sat in the silence and solitude of her own room, pondering these things in her heart, and feeling that, but for the other copy in the lawyer's hands, she might be tempted to hunt up and destroy the will in the secretary down-stairs, turn Nina adrift, and take possession. But that could not be done; and under the circumstances she was, for reasons of her own, well pleased that the child had been committed to her care.

As yet Nina knew nothing of this, and when, at length, communicated to her, it was far from being a cause of rejoicing; nay, at the moment, it seemed the bitterest drop in her cup.

She had come home almost heart-broken from seeing the grave close<sup>d</sup> over the remains of her beloved mother; had been with difficulty persuaded by Kezia to take a little food; and on leaving the dinner-table, she was returning to the sitting-room, when Mrs. Powell called to her.

"I think you have now wasted quite time enough in idle fretting," she said, "and there is no more to spare for it. We must leave for Philadelphia in the early morning train day after to-morrow; and you had better be gathering up and packing whatever you want to take with you."

For an instant Nina stood spell-bound with astonishment; then she answered, in a tone of decision, "But I am not going with you, 'Aunt Comfort; I choose to stay here with Kizzie. She loves me, and will take good care of me."

"You have no choice in the matter," was the cold reply. "Your home is henceforward to be with me until you come of age; for such was my sister's will; and I advise you to submit without making any fuss or objection, for it will not avail you in the least." She walked up-stairs as she spoke, leaving Nina standing in the hall below.

For one moment the child stood as if stunned by this new and unexpected blow; then she rushed away to the kitchen, and throwing herself into Kezia's arms, and clinging to her

with bitter weeping, cried: "Oh, Kizzie, Kizzie! don't let her take me away! I can't, I can't live with her; and I want to stay with you. Oh, I can't go away from my own dear home, and leave papa and mamma lying there in the graveyard! Kizzie, can't I stay?"

"I wish you could, with all my heart," said Kezia, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, then dropping it to stroke Nina's curls caressingly. "But you see how it is: the farm's to be rented out, and the house too, of course; and I'll have to look for another place; and I could n't take you with me. Besides, your mother said you were to live with your Aunt Comfort; and I'm sure you'd want to do as she wished?"

"Yes, Kizzie; but mamma would n't have said it if she'd known how I'd hate to go, and to live with her; for she is n't one bit—no, not one *bit* like mamma!"

"No; that's true enough; but try to like her, and to make her like you; and maybe you'll get along very well after all. And just think how nice 'twill be to take a journey all the way to Philadelphia, and to see the fine sights in that big city, and to get acquainted with your cousins."

Nina's only answer was a mournful smile almost sadder than tears; but Kezia, bent upon cheering the child and coaxing some of the old brightness into the pale, sorrowful, little face, went on to tell her of the provisions of Mr. Clemmens' will, and to speak of the joy of returning to take possession of the old home when she should come of age, promising that she too would come back and live with her if she was wanted.

That seemed to give some comfort, though Nina remarked, with a sigh, that "it was such a long, long while to wait."

"Oh, 'twill slip round 'fore you know it," said Kezia, cheerily. "I'll be through here presently, and then we'll go up to the garret and get your trunks; and I'll help you to gather up your things and pack 'em."

She managed to keep Nina with her the rest of the day, and

to prevent her from shedding very many tears, though occasional bursts of sorrow would come in spite of all her efforts.

Very weary was the little girl when nightfall came — weary with her sorrow and with her unaccustomed exertion — and she readily yielded to Kezia's advice that she should go to bed an hour earlier than usual.

“Did you say your prayers, Nancy?” asked Mrs. Powell, coming into the room just as the tired little head touched the pillow.

Nina started up, asking wrathfully, “Why do you call me that, Aunt Comfort? It is not my name!”

“Yes it is,” was the answer, in a cold, quiet tone. “My sister only called you Nina; but your true name is Nancy; and it is one of my principles to call people by the names that properly belong to them.”

“But it is not my name; and I will not be called by it. Mamma always said my name was Nina: she always called me that when she did n't say daughter or use some pet name” — and the childish voice was almost choked with sobs; “and it's written so in the big Bible, too.”

“No matter: I know what your name is, and shall not ask your leave to call you by it,” replied the cold, heartless voice. “But you have not answered my question. Did you say your prayers before getting into bed?”

“No, I did n't.”

“Then get right out and do it, you wicked girl.”

“I won't!” cried Nina. “I would rather be like mamma than like you.”

“What do you mean by that? What has that to do with your saying your prayers?”

“Why, you're one of the people that say prayers, and mamma was not when she was well; and she was always sweet and kind, and you are very unkind to me.”

“Spoiled children are very apt to think those unkind who reprove and punish them for their own good,” replied Mrs. Powell, freezingly. “And you have been very impertinent

to me. I am astonished that you would dare to tell me you won't do what I bid you. I will pass it over this once, in consideration of the present circumstances; but you had better beware how you repeat the offence."

She left the room as she finished speaking, and Nina, springing out of bed, ran to the kitchen, and throwing her arms around Kezia, cried, with a passionate burst of tears and sobs, "Is my name Nancy, Kizzie? She says it is; and she will call me so; and I can't bear it—such a hateful name! Is it my name, Kizzie?"

"No; your mother named you Nina, and she had a right to call you what she pleased: a better right to give you your name than anybody else," replied Kezia, her eyes sparkling with indignation. "But, there! never mind, you poor darling! I'll tell her she's mistaken, and I guess she'll not call you that again. My land! she had n't ought to; for I'm sure you've enough trouble just now without bein' pestered with such nonsense. But what was she sayin' to you, anyhow? I thought you'd gone to bed, and was fast asleep 'fore now."

Nina replied by an exact repetition of the conversation that had just passed between her aunt and herself.

"Oh! but you had n't ought to answer your aunt that way!" said Kezia, caressing her tenderly even while she reprov'd; "'twas real sassy; and I'm sure your mamma would never have let you talk so: she never allowed you to say won't to her. You don't think it was right, do you?"

"No; but she made me so angry I could n't help it; and what else could I say, Kizzie?"

"I guess 'I will''s as easy to say as 'I won't;' a'n't it? and it sounds considerable better."

"Yes; but I could n't say that when I was n't going to do it."

"And why not, Nina? Saying prayers is what everybody ought to do."

"I told you the reason I gave Aunt Comfort," replied the



child, slowly; "and I had another one besides. Once, when I went to Sunday-school with Lucy Dean, the teacher talked about praying; and she said it was not real prayer unless it came from the heart: if we only repeated prayers with our lips, it was mocking God; we must love him in our hearts, and really want what we asked for; and I've never forgotten it."

"You never do forget anything, I believe. But now, why should all that keep you from saying your prayers?"

"Because I don't love God!" cried the child, bitterly, while the hot tears streamed from her eyes, and her whole frame shook with sobs; and she clung to her friend, hiding her face on her bosom. "He's taken away my papa and mamma; and how can I love him?"

"Poor dear!" sighed Kezia; "I hope the day'll come when you'll see 't was all meant for good. But I am right sure you had ought to say your prayers, and that you'll feel the better for it."

"No; I won't be a hypocrite!" exclaimed the little girl, vehemently. "Papa said folks that make long prayers, and are not good, are hypocrites."

"To be sure; but that's no reason for not tryin' to live right, and asking God to help us. Nobody can be really good without God's help; and there are plenty of hypocrites that don't make prayers, as well as that do; and it's always right and wise to ask God to teach us to love him, and to pray with our hearts. And we need to ask him to take care of us; for s'pose he did n't—we'd all die 'fore mornin'; and besides, if he hasn't given us everything we'd like to have, he's given us a great deal more than we deserve. S'pose you had nothing to eat or to wear, and nobody to care for you at all; and isn't it mean and ungrateful to take it all and never return him a word of thanks."

"Yes," said Nina, softly; "I did n't think of that. I will thank him: I'll thank him that he has not taken you away, Kizzie. But, oh, dear! I'm to leave you so soon! and what

shall I do then, without *anybody* to be good to me?" and again the bitter tears and sobs burst forth, while she hung about Kezia's neck, as if she would never let her go.

"There, there! don't cry any more," said the latter, soothingly. "Why, I'm afraid you'll cry your eyes out, if you keep on this way. I have heard of folks going blind just from crying; and 't would be an awful thing if that should happen to you. So, now, just dry up your tears, and kiss me good-night, and go back to bed."

Nina obeyed with lamb-like submission; and, peeping in through the crack behind the door, Kezia saw that she knelt down beside the bed for a moment, before climbing into it.

"Need n't anybody tell me that child's hard to manage," she muttered, turning away with wet eyes; "you've only to treat her decent, and like a reasonable being, and she'll not give you a mite o' trouble. But I'm bound to give that woman a piece o' my mind afore I close my eyes this night. Calling her Nancy! bah! it's too bad! If Mrs. Clemmens had consulted me, my advice would have been never to let her sister into that secret. She might have knowed it would set her dead against the child."

Half an hour later, Mrs. Powell was in the sitting-room, examining the contents of the secretary, when Kezia, having finished her work in the kitchen, walked in and took a seat where she could look her full in the face.

There was some surprise and more annoyance in Mrs. Powell's tone, as she glanced at the intruder with a "Well, Kezia, what do you wish?"

"To have a little talk with you when you get through there; but I a'n't in no particular hurry: I can wait a spell."

"I am just done," said Mrs. Powell, closing the desk; "and, as it is about my usual hour for retiring to my own room, I hope you will make your remarks as brief as possible."

"I can't say that I'm over anxious for a very *long* talk with you," replied Kezia, in a slightly sarcastic tone; "but I've something on my mind that must be got off before I can

take my rest. I don't think you're disposed to be any too kind to that poor little orphan in yonder, Mrs. Powell," and a motion of her head indicated the next room.

"Little orphan?" repeated Mrs. Powell. "You cannot say she is that: for all you know, both her parents may be living."

"She's lost all the parents she ever knew," returned Kezia, in low, pitying tones; "and she's just about heart-broken, poor dear; and one would have thought that you, sharing the sorrow,—for I s'pose you loved your sister,—would have had some feelin' for her."

"And so I have; but I can't be expected to pet her as my sister did. I don't even pet my own: it's not my nature. And hers is but a selfish sorrow, after all. My sister took care of her, and petted and humored her, and she misses all that."

"Selfish sorrow!" cried Kezia, indignantly. "They say 'actions speak louder than words;' and that child has been waiting on her mother day and night for weeks past, caring nothing for play or rest either; and never thinking it a trouble to do anything for her. I've seen her sit by the hour fanning Mrs. Clemmens, and watching her while she slept, as still as a mouse; and she's a child that's naturally fonder than common of being in motion; and she'd never own she was tired, not a bit of it. You need n't tell me hers was a selfish love, or that her sorrow is either."

"You can't see a fault in her, I believe," was the cold reply.

"Yes, I can. I know she's got an awful quick temper, and is as proud as Lucifer, and careless and slovenly in her ways; but she's got her good qualities, too: there is n't the least mite of meanness or stinginess in her; and if you'll only love her, and treat her like a reasonable person—which she is, and no mistake—why she's as easy managed as any child that ever was born; but try to drive her, and you'll find her as stubborn as a mule."

“I have already made that discovery,” replied Mrs. Powell, in her most freezing tones. “I can see that her will has never been broken as it should have been, and that I shall have no end of trouble with her in consequence; but I intend to do my duty by her, no matter how difficult it may be.”

“I daresay; that is, you mean to cross her will on all occasions, even when it would hurt neither you nor her to let her have her own way; and this calling her Nancy is a specimen of it.”

Mrs. Powell colored slightly, and moved uneasily on her chair, but said nothing; and Kezia went on:

“Now there’s no earthly reason why you need do that. Nancy’s not her name no more’n it’s mine or yours. For who knows who the person was that wrote those lines? or whether she had the least right to name the child? Whoever it may have been, I’m sure she had n’t as good a right as Mrs. Clemmens; and she named her Nina; and would have had her called anything else sooner than Nancy, for she had a special dislike to that name, as I’ve heard her say many a time; and you’re not doing as she’d wish when you call the child by it. And if you’ve any sort o’ fear o’ the dead, Mrs. Powell, you’d better be good to Nina; for I happened to overhear Mrs. Clemmens tellin’ her husband one day—when she thought he’d outlive her, poor thing!—that if ever he let a stepmother abuse that child, she’d haunt him.”

“I don’t intend to abuse her; but I do mean to make her mind, when I get her home. But I think you are forgetting your place, Kezia. I must say I’m not used to reproof or advice from a servant.”

“I’m no servant of yours, Comfort Powell, and don’t ever intend to be; and you know well enough that I came of as good stock as yourself, and might be as well off now as you are, and better, too, if I’d chosen to marry a man I did n’t care for, for the sake of a good home, and money in my pocket. And your sister never called me a servant; though I helped her do her work for so many years, rather than

sponge off my relations, or sit at a trade that would have ruined my health."

"No; you're not an ordinary servant, I know; and I ought n't to have said that. But still I think you are presuming in lecturing me about my duty."

"Perhaps so; but it does folks good to hear a bit of the truth once in a while: and I want you to be good to that poor child. She's a very smart, observing one, I can tell you; and if you don't live up to your profession, she'll conclude that you're a hypocrite; and probably that all church members are. She'll compare you and all others with her mother, who was naturally the sweetest-tempered, kindest-hearted woman in the world; and if you fall short of the pattern, she'll think there's no truth in Christianity; don't you see? For her mother, you know, made no profession; and so you may make an infidel and a scoffer of the child, and maybe cost her the loss of her soul."

There was silence for a moment, while Mrs. Powell sat gazing thoughtfully at the carpet, Kezia watching her. Then she said, "You are certainly right about my sister's amiability; but I don't despair of being able to show Nina that Christians are quite as good, or better. Mr. Powell and I are very careful of the example we set; and I think no one can say it is not all that it ought to be; and you need not fear that I will abuse the child. I shall endeavor to do my whole duty by her."

"Well," said Kezia, rising, "I don't know; maybe I misjudge you; but all you've been saying sounds to me very much like the Pharisee's prayer, 'God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are.' Good-night! I've locked up the house, and am going to bed." And she took up her candle and went out.

"Strange, impertinent creature!" muttered Mrs. Powell, looking after her. "Well, I'm thankful that I have not to stay long under the same roof with her."

## CHAPTER IX.

## A STRANGER IN A STRANGE PLACE.

MRS. POWELL felt herself in a strait betwixt two. She was a very managing woman, and by no means content with settling such affairs as came legitimately under her control, but anxious to do the like service by those of other people also; and it cost her a pang of regret to go away, and leave Kezia to her own devices in regard to the packing and storing of the household linen, bedding, and furniture. Yet a still greater repugnance to allowing any one but herself the conduct of matters in her own family, kept her firm to her resolution to depart for home on the second day after seeing her sister's remains consigned to the grave.

By Nina this last day was spent principally in leave-takings of schoolmates and friends, and of many an object, animate and inanimate, dear to her warm, loving child-heart. The very hardest of all was the parting from Dr. Blake and Mrs. Croft, who seemed like second parents to the now almost friendless orphan. They bade her a very tender adieu, and left her all drowned in tears.

This was at eight o'clock in the evening, and Mrs. Powell immediately ordered her off to bed, where she presently wept herself to sleep.

The travellers were to take an early start: the train passed through the village at six, and Mrs. Powell had decided that it would not do to be later than half-past five in leaving the house, and had directed Abner to have the buggy at the gate at that hour precisely.

Nina slept heavily after the fatigue and excitement of the previous day; and Kezia would not disturb her, or allow any one else to do so, till breakfast was almost ready to set on the table.

The meal was a tempting one ; for Kezia, in her strong affection for the little girl, had exerted her utmost skill to make it so : but Nina ate scarcely anything ; and, leaving the table before the others were half done, picked up her hat and hurried toward the door.

“Where are you going ?” demanded Mrs. Powell, springing after her, and catching her by the arm.

“Let me go !” cried the child, in a choking voice, and making a violent effort to release herself.

“Not till you tell me where you are going. Answer me this instant !” And Mrs. Powell tightened her grasp.

“Let me go !” repeated Nina ; “let go of my arm, Aunt Comfort ! I must bid mamma good-bye once more ; oh, I must, I must ! I can’t go without !” And she burst into an agony of weeping.

“No ; you shall not ! it’s the most absurd nonsense ! As if my sister was there, and could see and hear you ! Just come back and finish your breakfast, like a reasonable being.”

“I don’t want any more ! and I must, I *will* go !” cried Nina again, exerting all her strength to free herself, but in vain.

Kezia now interfered, and begged that the child might be allowed this slight solace for her grief.

But Mrs. Powell would not be persuaded. “That dusty road and wet grass would render her clothes unfit for the journey,” she said ; “and she had been there yesterday ; and besides, there was not time now, for it was already nearly half-past five.” And Nina had to submit, though it almost broke her heart.

Kezia took her in her arms for a moment, soothing her with loving words of sympathy ; then led her back to the table and tried to induce her to eat a little more, but without success ; and presently Abner drove up to the gate, and the time for parting had come.

Nina clung to Kezia in speechless anguish ; while the latter strained her to her heart with tender caresses and whispered words of endearment, and of hope of a future reunion.

“Come, Nina, there’s no time to waste!” cried Mrs. Powell, impatiently; “come and get into the buggy at once. Good-morning, Kezia; I forgive all your impertinence, and wish you well.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” answered Kizzie, dryly, as she assisted Nina to climb to the seat by the side of her aunt, who was already in the vehicle; “but, so’s you’re good to the child, I don’t care particularly what your feelin’s are toward me; except that it’s wicked to be spiteful and unforgiving. I’m not meaning any impertinence now, Mrs. Powell, but I must just remind you of one thing the good Book says: ‘Ye fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged;’ and I hope you’ll remember that it was meant for mothers and aunts, as well as fathers. Good-bye; and I wish you a safe and pleasant journey.”

Nina hardly heard Kezia’s words; for, springing to her feet and dashing away the blinding tears, as Abner stepped into the buggy and gathered up the reins, she was taking a last loving farewell look at the dear home of her childhood.

A toss of the head and a curl of the lip were Mrs. Powell’s only reply to Kezia’s parting admonition; and, seizing Nina with no gentle hand, she dragged her down to the seat, and bade Abner drive on at his utmost speed.

He obeyed in silence; and for a while nothing was heard but the roll of the wheels, the thumping of the horse’s hoofs, and Nina’s bitter sobbing.

But at length, as they neared the village, Mrs. Powell said, in a cold, reproving tone, “Come, come, Nina; I think you have treated us to quite enough of this. I am heartily tired of sobs and tears; let us have something else.”

Touched to the quick by this harsh rebuke, the little mourner made a determined effort, and, calling pride to her aid, presently succeeded in checking her rising sobs, and forcing her tears back to their fountain. She was perfectly calm and quiet as they drew up and alighted at the door of the depot, but the expression of her face was very sad; and when



Abner came with the checks and tickets, and as the sound of the approaching train was heard, said he must bid her good-bye, her self-control was very near giving way again. Her lip quivered, and tears sprang to her eyes.

“You hain’t give me a kiss this two or three years back; and maybe we won’t never meet no more on this earth,” he whispered, with a wistful look; and, proud little lady as she was, she gave it at once; for she had known him all her life, and he was old enough to be her father. He had always petted her, too, in his rough fashion; and there were so few now left to love her.

How glad he looked, though there were tears in his eyes, too. He took her little soft white hand in his, pressed it to his lips, and held it fast while he led her to the car and handed her up the steps. Then with a bow and a murmured “God bless you, my pretty bird,” he stepped back and stood watching for her face at the window till the train moved on again.

He did not see it; for Mrs. Powell, muttering, “That vulgar, unbearable fellow,” was careful to select a seat on the farther side of the car, and to make Nina sit down there with her.

She soon perceived, to her annoyance, that Nina’s extreme beauty, joined to her deep mourning and sorrowful countenance, was attracting a great deal of attention from their fellow-travellers; and she could have shaken her for it, particularly as a whisper reached her ear: “That woman can’t possibly be her mother: she is so hard-featured; and the child is bewitchingly beautiful.”

Mrs. Powell colored with anger, and glanced at Nina to note the effect of the remark upon her; but she did not seem to have heard, and looked as if her thoughts were far away; perhaps lingering beside the graves it had been so hard to leave without a farewell visit.

This was not Nina’s first journey. Several times she had taken short trips over this same road in company with her

parents ; so that it lacked the charm of novelty, and at first her thoughts were more occupied with her unpleasant change of protectors, and a consequent renewed sense of her irreparable loss, than with anything else.

But at length, as they entered upon scenes entirely new to her, she began to look about her with something of the curiosity and interest natural to her age. She had never been in a city ; and when they arrived in New York, she felt quite bewildered by the noise and tumult ; but clinging close to her aunt, who seemed in nowise disturbed by it, she made the transit from car to stage, from stage to ferry-boat, and reached the depot, where they were to take the train for Philadelphia, in safety.

It was crowded with passengers that day, and they had some difficulty in obtaining seats. All were already filled in the first car they entered, and they had passed half-way down the second, when a lady made room for Mrs. Powell by her side, and at the same instant a gentleman beckoned Nina to a seat with him.

It took her to some distance from her aunt, and out of her view, as it was behind her, which Mrs. Powell did not like, thinking it gave the child too much liberty to act as she pleased ; but there was no help for it, and Nina went.

She slipped into the seat with a murmured "Thank you, sir," but without lifting her eyes, which were full of tears ; for she was feeling very sad and lonely in the crowd of strangers, and there was an inexpressible longing in her little sad heart for the love and protecting care that were wont to surround her.

Thus she did not notice the emotion of the gentleman as he first caught a full view of her face. That was as he rose and stepped aside to let her pass in and take the seat next the window. He started, became deadly pale, and trembled visibly. His color returned again in an instant ; but he seemed unable to remove his eyes from the child's face, and continued to regard her with an expression of intense and

painful interest, as he resumed his seat with her by his side ; while she, all unconscious of his gaze, was struggling hard to keep down the rising sobs and force back the tears that, spite of every effort, would roll down her cheeks.

The train was not yet in motion, so that conversation might be easily carried on ; and many of the passengers were engaged in lively chit-chat between themselves, or with friends who had come to see them off.

Nina's companion presently took the opportunity to speak to her. The deep mourning, the tears, and half-suppressed sobs and sighs had already told him more than half her sad story. He had a kind heart. It yearned over the little weeper.

"My dear little girl," he said, bending down, and speaking in a low tone of tender sympathy, "I see that sorrow and bereavement have been sent to you ; and I feel deeply for you. What can I do to comfort you?"

A fresh burst of tears and a silent shake of the head, were her only answer.

"My poor, little girl ! my poor, dear, little girl !" he whispered, pityingly, taking her hand in his.

His manner was so kind and fatherly, his tone so gentle and loving, that he completely won the desolate heart of the little orphan. She looked up gratefully through her tears, and as she met the yearning tenderness of his glance, the impulse was strong upon her to throw herself into his arms, and sob out all her bitter sorrow on his breast.

Ah, she little guessed how he was longing to take her into such a fatherly embrace.

But the train was put in motion, the noise preventing further talk for the present, and he straightened himself, leaned back in his seat, and opened the book he had been reading.

But he could not fix his attention upon it : his eyes were ever wandering from its pages to the face of his young companion, and his features worked with emotion as he looked, while now and then a heavy sigh escaped him. At length,

as the train paused for a moment at a way-station, he leaned toward her again, and in a low, gentle tone asked, "Will you tell me your name, my dear?"

"Nina Clemmens," she answered, without any hesitation; but her tone was low, and he caught only the last name.

"Clemmens," he repeated to himself. "I never met with any one of the name before. But where did she get that face? those eyes? I never thought to behold their like on earth again. Ah, if she were but mine! She is not the child of that woman, surely—so unlike. If not—if she should be in want of a home, a father."

A thrill ran through his whole frame at the thought. He leaned toward her again, and asked, with an inclination of the head toward Mrs. Powell, "Is that lady your mother, my dear?"

Nina shook her head, and the downward glance at her black dress, and the fast dropping tears, told him that his question had probed a still bleeding wound.

He regretted that he had asked it.

She struggled with her tears a moment; then answered, in low, quivering tones, "No, sir; that's Aunt Comfort. Papa died four weeks ago, and mamma last Sunday; and—and—" she could get no farther; the words choked her.

"My poor, poor child!" he said, involuntarily throwing his arm around her and drawing her close to his side.

Nina looked up and saw Mrs. Powell beckoning to her to come and take the seat next herself, which had just been vacated. Very unwillingly the child rose to obey.

"I must go," she said, struggling with her tears, and holding out her hand in farewell.

He took it and pressed it to his lips; then, still retaining it in a kindly grasp, "Wait one moment," he said. "You like candy, no doubt; all children do, I think. Here!"

He motioned to a lad who had come into the car with boxes of confectionery; bought one, and put it into Nina's hand.

“God bless and keep and comfort you, dear child!”

His lips just touched hers. She looked up with eyes nearly blinded with tears, made a vain effort to thank him, and at the same instant felt her arm seized by Mrs. Powell, who fairly dragged her away to the seat she had been summoning her to occupy.

“I think you will come when I call you, another time,” she said, speaking close to her ear, as she pushed her in next the window, and planted herself in front of her. “What business have you to be making acquaintance with strange men? How do you know who or what they are?”

The child’s quick temper rose at the rough treatment and undeserved reproof: her eyes flashed; she clenched her teeth hard, while her lip trembled and her bosom heaved, and turning her back upon her aunt, she looked steadily out of the window.

Mrs. Powell felt that she could have enjoyed shaking her well, but restrained herself for decency’s sake.

Nina’s temper was hasty and violent, but resentment was never long-lived with her; her nature was too noble for that. Five minutes later she turned toward her aunt a very sweet, though touchingly sad face, and with a beseeching look held out a peace-offering — the little box of confectionery.

Mrs. Powell rejected the overture with scorn. She was not to be cajoled with sweets, not she; Nina read it plainly enough in the sudden drawing up of her angular figure, the cold, set look about her mouth, and the freezing expression of her hard black eyes.

The child’s anger was roused again. “Who cares? I’m sure I don’t,” she muttered to herself, as she opened her satchel and bestowed the candy there. But her little heart was very heavy; too heavy for even sweetmeats to tempt her appetite.

Two young girls sitting nearly opposite had watched the whole scene.

“Would n’t I like to shake that woman well?” whispered one to the other. “I fairly ache to do it.”

"I should enjoy seeing you, provided you did it with a will," rejoined her companion, through her shut teeth.

Nina's new friend, too, was looking on with a heart full of sorrowful indignation, and a longing desire to rescue the little one from her tormentor. He made an effort. Going to Mrs. Powell's side, when next the train stopped, "Excuse me, madam," he said, courteously, lifting his hat with a slight bow as he spoke, "if what I am about to say seem impertinent; and, believe me, I do not mean it so. But my heart is strongly drawn toward this little girl, especially on account of her remarkable likeness to one now in glory who was inexpressibly dear to me,"—his voice almost failed him for an instant, but controlling it with an effort he went on,— "and I cannot refrain from asking if you would be willing to resign her to me? I would like to adopt her as my own, and —"

"Sir!" interrupted Mrs. Powell, with dignity; "do you mean to insult me? I know nothing of who or what you are."

"I was about to say that I could give you the best of references as to my character, standing in society, and so forth."

"It is entirely unnecessary, useless. I promised my sister that I would bring her up myself; and I am not one to break my word."

"Then let me beg of you to be patient and forbearing with her childish faults, and to remember that God is in an especial manner the Father of the fatherless, their helper and protector."

Mrs. Powell was literally speechless with rage and astonishment; but Nina, who had listened with almost breathless eagerness to the short colloquy, started up, exclaiming eagerly, "Oh, Aunt Comfort, do let me go with him! I am only a trouble to you, you know."

A withering look was the only reply.

"Good-bye, my dear child," the stranger said, holding out his hand; for the train was starting again, and they must part.

Nina put hers into it for an instant, and looked up long-

ingly into his face, meeting a glance of tender, loving sympathy in return: then as he went away, she covered her face with her hands to hide the tears she could not restrain. "Oh, he is so good, so kind; and I shall never see him again!" was the cry of her sorrowful little heart, repeated yet more bitterly as she saw him leave the car at the next station.

Mrs. Powell did not address her again for a long time, not until every one seemed to be preparing to leave the cars, which were moving very slowly. Then she said, "This is Camden, Nina; we have only to cross the river to be in Philadelphia. There, we have stopped. Come, bring that basket; we must make haste or we shall miss the ferry-boat."

Nina obeyed, pushing her way through the crowd as best she might, and with difficulty keeping near her aunt, who paid her not the slightest attention.

Mr. Powell met them as they landed at the Walnut Street wharf. He was a little, thin, wiry-looking man, with a meek, submissive air strangely in contrast with that of his wife. He shook hands with her, saying, "Ah, Comfort, how do you do? I'm right glad you've got back." Then turning to Nina, "And this is Esther's child, I suppose? How do you do, my dear? I hope you'll like Philadelphia."

He grasped her hand for an instant, then hurried them into an omnibus, which was already nearly full.

Nina found herself squeezed in between a great fat man and a mulatto child's-nurse with a babe in her arms, while Mr. and Mrs. Powell sat directly opposite.

As they rattled on over the stones, there was just light enough to enable her to improve the opportunity to study the countenance of this new relative. She heaved an involuntary sigh as she did so; for almost unconsciously she had been hoping to find a friend in him, and she was disappointed; for though he did not look unkind, there was nothing attractive in his countenance; it lacked manliness and decision; and child as she was, though a quick-witted one, she soon came to the conclusion, from something in his manner, that he was

afraid of his wife ; and from that moment she despised him in her heart.

The omnibus set them down at the corner of Sixth Street. Mrs. Powell took her husband's arm, and started on a rapid walk up the street, calling to Nina, in her sharp, imperative tones, to keep close behind them.

By dint of a good deal of exertion, the child managed to obey ; but her little feet, unaccustomed to the hard city pavements, grew very weary.

Daylight was fading into night as they reached the door of her new home, a three-story brick house, just like dozens of others they had passed ; at least, so it seemed to Nina ; and she wondered how she should ever be able to tell it from the rest, if she should walk out alone. There was nothing home-like to her in its appearance ; and it was with a sad and shrinking heart that she crossed its threshold, following her aunt and uncle into a narrow, carpeted hall dimly lighted.

They passed on up a flight of stairs, Mrs. Powell glancing over her shoulder at Nina, and ordering her to "be careful to step on the oil-cloth, and not on the carpet, — a thing she allowed no one to do."

The sitting-room was in the second story of the back building, and opened upon the first landing. A boy of fourteen, the very image of Mrs. Powell, stood in the doorway.

"So you've got back, mother," he remarked.

"Yes, Homer," she said, shaking hands with him and a younger son whom she called Sylvester. "But what's the baby doing up at this hour? she should have been in bed long ago. But it seems my rules become a dead letter in my absence."

She looked severely at her husband as she spoke. He hung his head, and answered, meekly, that he had thought Ann would attend to it.

"Just like a man," she said, sneeringly, as she took up the little toddling thing in question, caressing it, and another who was clinging to her skirts, with more warmth of affection than Nina had ever thought her capable of.



“Come, my dear, walk in and make yourself at home,” said Mr. Powell to Nina, who had slowly mounted the stairs, and now stood at the sitting-room door, looking with sad, wistful eyes at the children as they clustered about their mother.

“Come in,” repeated her uncle. “Children, this is your little Cousin Nina, who has come to live with us. Shake hands with her, boys. Essie, have n’t you a kiss of welcome for the new cousin?”

Homer stepped forward and gave her his hand in a cold, stiff, formal way. Sylvester followed, grabbed her hand and shook it roughly, staring at her in a very rude, disagreeable manner, and finishing with an ugly grimace, seen by no one but herself.

Nina turned from them in disgust and aversion.

“Come, Essie, and speak to your cousin,” repeated Mr. Powell.

The child, a sweet-faced little girl of four, with the fair complexion, pretty blue eyes, and sunny hair of the aunt for whom she was named, hung shyly back for a moment; then, as Nina, struck with the likeness to her almost idolized mother, stooped and held out her arms, with a winning, though tearful smile, she sprang forward, and held up her face for the kiss, saying, in sweet, childish treble, “I like you; Essie like new cousin.”

“You darling!” was Nina’s almost inaudible exclamation, as she hugged the little creature tightly, and kissed her two or three times.

“Come, Nina, and I will conduct you to your room,” said her aunt. “The tea-bell will ring in a few minutes.”

“The child must be tired, Comfort: can’t she take off her things here?” suggested Mr. Powell, in the mild, half-hesitating tone of one accustomed to be snubbed, and not expecting his wishes or opinions to have much weight.

“Certainly not!” was the reply. “I should have thought you had lived long enough with me, Mr. Powell, to know

my rules better than that. 'A place for everything and everything in its place,' is a rule I have always insisted upon, and always shall; and the place for Nina's things is in her own room."

"Of course, my dear; and your rules are excellent; but could not Homer or Syllie carry them up for her this once?"

"And let her go down to tea with all the dust of travel still on her face, her hands, and her clothing, I suppose," said his wife, sneeringly.

"Plenty of soap and water in the bath-room yonder," replied Mr. Powell, with a tone and manner that seemed to say he was astonished at his own temerity.

His wife evidently was; and deigning no other answer than a meaning look, as she put the babe into his arms, she walked out of the room, commanding Nina to follow her.

The little girl, though indeed very weary, obeyed without a word.

A short flight of stairs brought them to the second story of the main building; but Mrs. Powell made no pause here; turning to another flight, she kept on till the third story was reached, Nina following close behind her.

They passed the first door, Mrs. Powell saying, "That is the boys' room," and went on to another, which she opened. "This is to be your room," she said, stepping in, "and I presume you will find it in good order — every article in its place, and no dust or dirt to be seen; and that is the way in which I expect it to be kept."

She was lighting the gas as she spoke, taking a match from a box which hung on the wall immediately beneath the burner, and striking it on the roughened part. "Remember," she continued, "you are never, upon any account, to strike a match on the wall. It is a trick I will not allow. Yes, the room is in order, I see;" and she glanced searchingly about, "though I believe there is a trifle of dust on the bureau and the mantel. I shall send Ann up to remove it. Now look, Nina, here is a closet with pegs, where you are to

hang your dresses and out-door garments ; and shelves for the rest of your clothes. Take off your hat and sacque, and hang them on this peg : and remember that is exactly where they are always to be put. Now I will leave you. There is water in the pitcher on the washstand, and soap beside it ; and there are towels in the drawer ; and you have a comb and brush in your satchel. Make haste and use them all ; and when you hear the bell for tea, turn down the gas so, and come down to the dining-room. It is under the sitting-room, on the ground-floor of the back building. Do you understand ?”

“ Yes, ma’am. Aunt Comfort, may I give some of my candy to the little ones ?”

“ No ; no child of mine shall taste anything bought with the money of that man. And that reminds me that you have behaved very ill to-day, and richly deserve severe punishment ; yet, in consideration of your recent loss, I will pass it over for this once ; but beware how you show me a repetition of such conduct.”

With these threats and reproaches, spoken in hard, cold tones, and without one caress, one word of sympathy or of welcome to the desolate, homesick little creature whom her sister had, with her dying breath, entreated her to love and cherish, this paragon of perfection, this model wife and mother, as she deemed herself, went out and closed the door behind her.

The child stood in the middle of the floor listening to the sound of her retreating footsteps, till they could no longer be heard. Then she cast a hasty glance around the room. She had seen it only in detail while her aunt was there, but now took in the whole effect, which was far from cheering ; for bare, whitewashed walls, guiltless of the slightest adornment, curtainless windows, coarse, faded, worn rag carpet and quilt, and rough, unpainted wooden furniture very much the worse for the wear, formed a most displeasing contrast to her customary surroundings at Oakdale, in the pretty, cosy chamber her fond parents had taken such pains to fit up and adorn for

their darling. Here, there was nothing inviting to the eye save the perfect neatness and order always to be found where Mrs. Powell held sway.

Nina had a strong love for the beautiful, and the change was exceedingly distasteful to her.

Yet all this was as nothing, compared to the loss of the love and tender solicitude which had surrounded her during all her infant years; there came over her at that moment such an overwhelming sense of it, — that bitter, irreparable loss, — that she sank upon her knees, clasping her hands together and dropping her head upon her breast, with a low, passionate cry, “Oh, mamma! oh, papa! I want you! oh, I want you! I can’t, I can’t do without you!”

But she felt that the time had not yet come when she might venture to indulge her grief; and suppressing by a mighty effort the heaving sobs, and dashing away the falling tears, she rose up hastily, and obeyed as quickly as she could the directions her aunt had given.

She had not quite finished when a bell rang below, and she heard the others leave the sitting-room and go down to the lower floor.

“There; I shall be late, and shall get a scolding,” she said to herself. “Well, what need I care? I’ll have to get used to it.” And, laying aside her comb and brush, she began washing her hands.

A stumbling step came along the passage, and some one fumbled at the door.

“Who’s there?” she demanded.

“It’s only me, miss, Ann Quinn,” answered a rough-looking, half-grown Irish girl, coming in with a bucket of water in one hand and a duster in the other. “The mistress she won’t ’low me no candle, ’cause I’ll drop grease or set the house a-fire, she says; nor she won’t have the gas lit, neither; an’ so I’ve to fumble about in the dark to find the door-handles; an’ I’ve come up to fill the pitchers, and to wipe off that dust on the mantel an’ table here, that niver a sowl

but herself could find. Beggin' yer pardon, miss, but ye'd better hurry, or ye'll be afther gettin' a scoulding; for they're all at the table, and the mistress is sure to be mad if anybody's late."

"Yes, I'm just ready," said Nina, hanging up the towel she had been using. "Will you turn down the gas when you're done here?"

"Sure an' I will, thin; for a purty scoulding I'd get if I did n't," the girl answered, in a rough, but not ill-natured tone. And Nina went out, and groped her way down to the sitting-room door.

From there the lamp in the lower hall gave her sufficient light, and she had no difficulty in finding the dining-room, as the door stood open, and she could see the family seated about the table.

"Come in; here's a seat for you," said Mr. Powell.

"We will excuse your lateness this time, Nina," said her aunt, as the child came forward and took the offered chair; "but after this you must endeavor to be punctual."

Nina received the implied rebuke in silence, and accepted, with a murmured "Thank you, sir," the bread and butter Mr. Powell put upon her plate; though she glanced over the table with an emotion of surprise at the meagre fare, — only cold bread, a little stale, and firkin butter so strong that she found difficulty in forcing herself to eat it; for she had always been used to the sweetest and freshest butter made by Kizzie's skilful hands.

There was tea for the grown people; but the children had each only a cup of cold water, which Mrs. Powell said was far more wholesome for them; though perchance she might not have been so sure of that had it not also been much cheaper; for she was a notable housekeeper — in her own estimation, at least — and knew well how to economize by abridging the comforts of her family.

One piece of bread was all Nina wanted; and she was ready to leave the table as soon as the others were.

They all repaired to the sitting-room again, where they

seated themselves in solemn silence, Nina wondering what it meant till she saw her uncle open a large Bible that lay on the table.

He selected a very long chapter in the Old Testament—or perhaps had come to it in course—a part of the Levitical law, which she did not understand or care to listen to; and she had great difficulty in keeping awake. Then followed a long, tedious prayer, uttered in a dull, monotonous tone, well suited to give the impression that the suppliant was merely repeating by rote a lesson in which he felt no personal interest: and poor, weary, little Nina, worn out with her journey, and even more with her grief, fell fast asleep before it was half over.

But at its conclusion, Homer, who knelt near her, gave her a slight push, which woke her suddenly, and she rose with the others.

“You can go to bed now, Nina,” said her aunt; and the little girl gladly availed herself of the permission.

She was not quite out of hearing when Homer said, “She went fast asleep while you were praying, father;” and Mrs. Powell answered, “Yes, I daresay; she’s a wicked girl, who has no love for prayer; indeed, dislikes it so much that she stoutly refused to say her prayers one night when I bade her.”

Nina heard the words distinctly, and she felt her cheeks burn, and her eyes fill with hot, indignant tears.

“Aunt Comfort hates me,” she thought; “and she is trying to set them all against me.”

She would have liked to stop there upon the stairs to hear the rest of the conversation; but her mother had long ago taught her that eavesdropping was very mean, almost as bad as stealing, and that “listeners never hear any good of themselves;” and scorning the mean act, Nina hurried on out of earshot, and was soon in her room, where, having locked the door, she threw herself upon the bed in a wild paroxysm of grief and anger.

Very, very lonely and desolate she felt, and intensely she

longed for the love and sympathy which had hitherto made her life so bright and joyous, while bitterly, *most* bitterly, she mourned over the certainty that they were gone from her forever.

Then she thought of the stranger who had taken such kind notice of her in the cars that day. She seemed again to feel the gentle, sympathizing pressure of his hand, and to hear the soothing, tender tones of his voice. Ah, if Aunt Comfort would but have let her go with him! But now she could never hope to see him again; and that thought added to her grief.

She wept on till the violence of her emotion had spent itself; then rose, and languidly began her preparations for the night's rest. The moment these were completed, she crept into bed, utter weariness, joined to a defiant feeling toward her aunt, who would have required it if present, preventing her from bending her knees, even for a moment, in prayer.

Mr. and Mrs. Powell had a long conversation that night, — though rather one-sided, it may be observed, she being the principal speaker; he, for the most part, merely a listener; except when she asked a question or made a remark to which she seemed to expect an answer.

He had to render up a strict account of his stewardship during her absence; and she gave him the whole history of her visit, including every detail concerning Nina; not omitting her own conjectures in regard to the child's parentage, or her feelings of indignation that the property of her sister and brother-in-law had been left to one who belonged to them only by adoption, instead of to herself, whose claim of kindred she considered so much stronger. "Was it not too bad, Thomas?" she asked, in conclusion.

"I wish it had come to you; it would have helped us along nicely with our growing family," he said; "but still, I can hardly blame them for wanting to provide for her; for I suppose they felt toward her pretty much the same as though

she 'd been their own. And no wonder, either; for she's a beautiful child, Comfort—a great deal handsomer than any of ours."

"'Handsome is that handsome does,'" replied his wife, coldly; "and, I can tell you, she's a perfect young tigress. I would n't be willing a child of mine should have such a temper as hers, even if it would make it as beautiful as an angel."

"I wonder you undertook the care of her," he said, with a look of dismay.

"You need not be alarmed," she answered, somewhat contemptuously; "I have no doubt I shall be able to manage her. But I am surprised, Mr. Powell, that you know so little of my willingness to sacrifice myself for the good of others, as to express any wonder that I should consent to undertake such a charge, particularly when it was the request of an only and dying sister."

"Excuse me, my dear; I ought to have known you better," he said, meekly; "but I fear I shall never be able fully to appreciate your many excellences of character."

"No; I never expect to be fully appreciated in this world," she remarked, with a sigh of resignation to her hard fate. "I feel that I have done a truly praiseworthy deed in accepting the disagreeable task of bringing up this child of strangers," she went on; "but we are not required to work for nothing, and I intend to make it pay."

"How?" he asked, with some curiosity.

"I shall charge well for her board, her washing and ironing, the care of her clothes, etc., etc., and I shall make her useful in various ways about the house."

"I see," he answered, slowly; "but don't let us rob the orphan, Comfort: I'm superstitious about that. You know we're told 'God is the father of the fatherless;' and I don't think there's ever a blessing on what's taken from them."

"Nonsense! Mr. Powell. What *are* you talking about? She's not Esther's child; and I have hardly a doubt that her



parents are living. Besides, who thinks of robbing her? I am only not going to work for nothing and find myself."

"Well, well, Comfort; no doubt you know what's right, and will do it, too," he said, turning over to go to sleep; "but if you're right in your conjectures, the child's a great deal worse off, to my thinking, than if she was an orphan."

"Come, don't go to sleep yet," she said; "I have something more to tell;" and she went on to give an account of the unexpected offer of the strange gentleman to adopt Nina.

"Surprising!" exclaimed Mr. Powell. "But did you not feel tempted to accept it? may you not have been a little too hasty in giving so decided a refusal on the spur of the moment? It would have been so easy an escape from all the trouble and care over the prospect of which you have just been groaning."

"Mr. Powell, do you take me for a born fool?" was the indignant rejoinder; "or are you one yourself? Have I not already explained to you that I expect to make a good thing of having her here?"

"Ah, excuse me, I—I—had forgotten," he answered, sleepily, ending with a slight snore.

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## CHAPTER X.

### RULE OF A STRONG-MINDED WOMAN.

**M**RS. POWELL was an early riser, and required all under her rule to follow her example in this respect. Nina had been duly informed that a rousing-bell would be rung at half-past five, and that at six all were required to be in the sitting-room to attend family worship; the penalty of failure being the partial or entire loss of breakfast, according to the extent and inexcusableness of the delinquency.

Fortunately for her, she had been accustomed to early hours, and was of too active a temperament to feel it a great hardship to have to be up betimes. Nor did her couch of straw, hard and uneven, invite to lengthened repose. She was also naturally quick in her movements; so that half an hour was, to her, quite sufficient for the duties of the toilet; and at the ringing of the bell for prayer, she made her appearance in the sitting-room with hair and dress in perfect order.

The family devotions were a repetition of those of the night before, except that a short psalm was substituted for the long chapter.

Breakfast followed immediately after prayers, the bell ringing just as they rose from their knees, at a quarter-past six.

It was Mrs. Powell's boast that everything went on like clock-work in her family when she was at the helm of affairs. She did not consider it necessary for the servants to be present at family worship: their time was too valuable. Peggy, the cook, must be getting the breakfast, and Ann was needed to set the table, and to answer the door-bell if it rang.

Nina found the morning meal a little more abundant and inviting than the one she had sat down to the night before; but even it was very meagre in comparison with those she had been accustomed to at Oakdale, and she felt the change very sensibly. She made no complaint, however, but thought within herself, that "perhaps it was because Aunt Comfort had been away so long; and maybe things would be better soon, now that she was at home again."

It was Mrs. Powell's custom to give her orders for the day, to husband and children, while she had them all together at the breakfast-table. On this particular morning, Mr. Powell was reminded of some commission he was to execute for her "down town;" the boys were bidden to do various errands, then review their lessons, learned the previous afternoon, and go to school; while Nina was directed to put her room in order immediately on the conclusion of the meal, and afterward to

unpack her trunk and arrange her clothes neatly in the closet and the bureau-drawers.

Even little four-year-old Essie had a duty assigned to her ; she must watch over and amuse the baby while her mother went to market.

“ Oh, mamma, I don't want to,” she said, a shade coming over her bright little face ; “ baby won't be good with me.”

“ Esther, you must do as your mother bids you, and without ever saying, ‘ I don't want to,’ ” replied Mrs. Powell, in a tone of severity that made the tears start to the sweet blue eyes, and sent one or two rolling quickly down the rosy cheeks.

Nina longed to kiss them away, and comfort the darling with a promise to undertake her task for her ; but Mrs. Powell said, still more severely, “ Naughty girl ! go right away from the table. I will have no crying here ; and especially not when it's just because you cannot have your own way.”

The child got down from her chair, and went sobbing from the room. Nina half rose to follow her ; but was stopped by a peremptory order to “ sit still till she had permission to leave the table.”

She obeyed in silence, though boiling with indignation against her aunt, and wondering how the others could take it so coolly, as quite an everyday occurrence ; for little Essie — her mother's namesake and her mother's image — had already possessed herself of the warmest corner of Nina's very warm heart. The orphan's strong affections, torn with so sudden and cruel a wrench from the parent stem to which they were wont to cling, were reaching out, in their helpless agony, for other support around which to entwine their beautiful tendrils ; and this sweet, young cousin was the first suitable object they had been able to lay hold upon. Nina had found something to love ; and she was no longer utterly desolate.

Essie had gone into the kitchen, and Nina, hearing her half-suppressed sobs as she passed the door on her way from the dining-room, turned to go in there, with the intention of

trying to comfort her ; but Mrs. Powell's voice arrested her on the threshold.

“No, you are not to go in there,” she said, sharply. “I don't allow any comforting of children who are in disgrace with me. Go directly to your own room, and perform the tasks I have given you there.”

Nina obeyed, going slowly up the stairs ; but first gave Mrs. Powell a look which that lady would certainly have visited with condign punishment had she seen it. But fortunately for the culprit, Peggy had at that moment drawn the attention of her mistress another way, by coming to the kitchen-door and asking directions about dinner.

“I'd like to beat her, so I would, the *mean*, cross, old thing !” muttered Nina, between her clenched teeth, as she slammed to the door of her own room, and threw herself passionately down upon the one hard, wooden chair. “I'm glad she's not my mamma.”

But with the words came the remembrance that, though not Mrs. Powell's child, she was now under her authority, and must obey her orders, or probably be made to suffer some very unpleasant consequences. And jumping up, she set to work to make the bed and dust the furniture.

She was accustomed to such tasks, having often assisted her mother in that way ; and being fond of active exertion, she grew more cheerful and contented as she moved quickly about, trying to make everything look its very best.

But with all her efforts, the room still had a bare, unfurnished appearance, very, very different from the one she loved so well. She sighed drearily as she perceived it ; then a bright thought struck her : why should she not send to Kizzie for the furniture of that room, — carpet, curtains, pictures, everything ; all were hers, her very own, — Kizzie had told her so, and they could be easily moved. And perhaps her aunt might be persuaded to let her buy some pretty paper with her own money, and have it put on the walls. It would make her so much happier, because she

would feel so much more at home. And, eager to carry out her plan with all speed, she ran down-stairs in search of her aunt.

But Mrs. Powell had not yet returned from market, as Nina was informed by Ann, whom she met at the foot of the first flight of stairs; and suddenly remembering that she had still to unpack and arrange her wardrobe, the little girl hastened back to attend to it.

In her anxiety to get through quickly, she was tempted to slight this part of her work; but reflecting that her aunt would probably come up and examine it, and would be much less likely to grant her request if any fault could be found with the performance of her allotted task, she was careful to do it so well as to leave no room for censure.

She had just finished when the door opened and Mrs. Powell walked in.

“The room looks neat,” she said, sending a keen, searching glance around it. “I see you have been taught how to make a bed and dust a room properly, which is more than can be said of half the girls who live out as chamber-maids.”

She looked into the closet, pulled open and shut the bureau-drawers one after another, without remark, until she came to the last, when she said, “Your work is all very well done: I never withhold praise when it is fairly earned. Now you may come down-stairs with me, and I will find you further employment.”

“But, aunt,” said Nina, as she was turning to leave the room, “I want to ask you something.”

“Well, ask it quickly, then,” was the reply; “for time is precious, and must n't be wasted.”

Nina unfolded her plan, speaking rapidly and eagerly, as was her habit when very anxious to gain her point; while Mrs. Powell stood listening with unmoved countenance, and an air of cold, quiet determination not to be influenced to do or allow aught against her own inclination or interests.

“I will consider the matter, Nina, and give you an answer this afternoon,” she said, as the child ceased speaking. “But

come, now, and show how anxious you are to please me by working industriously. This is sweeping-day, and there is a great deal to be done."

She left the room as she spoke, and Nina followed, feeling a good deal disappointed, but still hopeful for the final result, if she should be able to keep in her aunt's good graces through the remainder of the day—a very doubtful thing.

Mrs. Powell led the way to the parlor.

"This has been swept," she said, "but not dusted, as you may readily see. I shall dust the mantels and the ornaments on them,—which I never allow to be touched by any hands but my own,—and also the picture-frames; and then I will leave you to do the rest. The dining-room, too, has been swept, and when you are done here you will go and dust it; and after that the sitting-room, and then my room."

Nina looked somewhat aghast at the amount of work thus laid out for her; but merely said, "Yes, ma'am," and, taking the duster her aunt handed her, began at once with the sofas and chairs.

The parlor furniture was quite handsome, and, she could not help thinking, entirely out of keeping with that of her own room. But she had not been many days in the family before she learned to understand it. It was Mrs. Powell's principle always to "put the best foot foremost," as she expressed it; and, accordingly, those parts of her house which were open to visitors were furnished much more expensively than those occupied by the family, and likely to be seen only by themselves or their very intimate friends. She would have no dirt or disorder in any part of her dwelling; but anything was good enough for themselves, provided it was clean and whole, and not liable to be seen by strangers. And the less expense they put on the rooms in the back building, the third story, and the attic, the more they could afford for the parlor and the rooms immediately over it,—the company bed-room, and her own, which, being close to the former, could not always be kept out of sight, and must therefore be comfortably furnished.

It was nearly noon when at length Nina had completed the task set her ; and as she shook out her duster for the last time, she owned to herself that she felt very tired indeed.

"Now," said her aunt, "go up-stairs and make yourself neat again ; and then come down and amuse the children till dinner is ready ; which will be in about three-quarters of an hour."

An indignant flush rose to the little girl's cheek ; for she thought to herself, "She treats me like a slave. Mamma would not have let me do the half of what I've done already this morning."

But that the boon she had craved was yet ungranted, Nina could hardly have suppressed the angry words that trembled on her lips. She hastily left the room to do her aunt's bidding.

When she came down again, the little ones were in the sitting-room, and Essie came running to meet her with outstretched arms.

"I love you, Cousin Nina," she said, holding up her face for a kiss.

"And I love you, you darling little pet!" was Nina's glad response, as she clasped the child in a close, affectionate embrace.

"What makes you cry?" asked Essie, softly ; for Nina's eyes were full of tears.

"Because my precious, darling mamma is gone away, and will never come back," sobbed Nina, hiding her face on the little one's shoulder ; "and I've had to leave my dear home, too, and Kizzie ; and — and there's nobody to love me."

"Only me : Essie loves you, Essie does ; so don't cry any more," she said, in sweet, coaxing tones, and softly kissing Nina's wet cheek, while she hugged her tighter than before.

"I'm so glad you do," whispered Nina, hastily returning the caress and releasing Essie ; for the baby was fretting, and, as no one else was in the room, she felt obliged to leave the older child, and attend to it.

The baby was a fretful, uninteresting child, and Nina felt greatly relieved when the dinner-bell rang and Ann came to take charge of it.

After dinner, Nina followed her aunt to the sitting-room, and was about to ask if she might not now have an answer to the request she had made in the morning, when Mrs. Powell stopped her by remarking, "I think you must have some clothes that need mending, have n't you? Are your stockings all whole?"

"Not quite all; some of them have holes."

"Then bring them down and mend them at once. 'A stitch in time saves nine.'"

"Can't I rest a while first?" asked the child, adding, "I've been at work all the morning; and I feel real tired."

"Change of works is all the rest you need, I think," was the cold reply. "You have been on your feet a good deal, and of course need to sit down awhile; but you can use your hands to do a little sewing while you sit. It is an excellent rule never to be idle; and you are old enough now to give up childish amusements, and to feel it a duty to improve all your time."

"Mamma did n't think I was too old to play a part of the time," said Nina, tears starting to her eyes, — for she had not yet learned to mention that beloved name without emotion; — "and she always mended my stockings for me; and I don't know how."

"I will teach you how," said her aunt. "Go and bring them down at once. You need not feel abused; for I require no more of you than of myself. I never waste time in idleness."

Nina obeyed, sighing to herself, as she went slowly up the stairs, "Mamma used to say that even big folks needed to play some, and little folks a good deal; and I'm sure I *can't* work all the time."

She was strongly tempted to rebel; but the sight of her ill-furnished room, as she opened the door, helped her failing



resolution to be good, in the hope of gaining the coveted permission to improve its appearance.

So gathering up the articles she had been sent for, she went down to the sitting-room again, seated herself beside Mrs. Powell, listened patiently to her instructions, and did her best to follow them.

At length she ventured a repetition of the morning's request, reminding her aunt that she had promised an answer that afternoon. "Wait till you have finished the stockings," was the ungracious rejoinder.

"It will take me all the afternoon!" sighed Nina, dejectedly.

"And what if it does? It will teach you patience, — a lesson you have great need to learn."

Indignant tears rushed to the child's eyes; but she hastily wiped them away, and went on forcing her weary little fingers through their hated task.

At last it was done; and as she folded the last pair, she said, "Now, Aunt Comfort, you will tell me; won't you? May I write to Kizzie to-morrow to send the things?"

"No; you may *not*!" Mrs. Powell answered, in freezing tones; "they are all here now except the furniture; and it would cost quite too much to bring that; and, besides, the room is plenty good enough for you as it is."

"I meant to pay for it all with my own money that papa and mamma left me," said Nina, controlling her temper with great difficulty: "and so it would n't cost you anything, Aunt Comfort."

"You have nothing to do with the spending of that money," replied Mrs. Powell; "and I don't choose to have it spent in any such folly."

Nina could have stamped and screamed with passion; but again she controlled herself and spoke in her ordinary tones.

"Well, Aunt Comfort, if I can't have the furniture, I suppose I can have the other things, — the carpet and curtains and spread, and my pretty pictures, — as you say they are all here?"

“You need not suppose any such thing,” replied Mrs. Powell, coolly; “and I have already said that the room is quite good enough for you as it is. I am not going to have my washing increased by white curtains and spread for you, every now and then; and the pictures shall be hung in the parlor, where some one else can have the pleasure of looking at them as well as you. The carpet shall be laid away till it is needed; there is no reason why you should have a better one on your bedroom floor than it has on it now.”

For a moment Nina was struck dumb with astonishment and indignation; then she burst out in such a storm of passion as astonished Mrs. Powell in her turn, well as she thought herself acquainted with the child's temper.

“How dare you!” she cried, stamping her foot with rage, and looking at her aunt with flashing eyes. “They are *my* things; and I *will* have them! You *shan't* put *one* of them into your old parlor, or any of your rooms! I'll tear them down, if you do!”

The quiet contempt in Mrs. Powell's manner, as she rose and deliberately folded and laid aside her work; the cold glance of her eye, which seemed to say: “You may rage as you like; it will be as useless as the beating of the waves against a rock; for I have you entirely in my power, as you shall be made to feel to your cost,” was almost maddening to the high, untamed spirit of the child, used to no control but that of the gentlest and most affectionate of mothers; and she poured forth a torrent of bitter words which Mrs. Powell never forgot or forgave; though she listened to them with unmoved countenance, giving herself great credit for her Christian forbearance in so doing.

“Well!” she said at length, as Nina finished with a burst of passionate weeping; “have you done now? wicked, ungrateful, rebellious girl that you are! I should be serving you right, if I turned you into the street to take care of yourself as you best could. But I am too good a Christian for that; and tittle as you deserve it, I shall still give you a

home here in my house. Yet after such behavior as this, you cannot be permitted to remain in my presence, or to mingle with the rest of the family, till you humbly beg my pardon, and promise to be submissive and respectful in future. Go this instant to your room, and stay there till you are ready to do so."

"I'm glad to go! I don't want to stay where you are," Nina answered, gathering up her work and hurrying from the room; "but I'll not ask you pardon till you ask mine; for I never would have been saucy to you if you had n't abused me so."

"Did ever I hear the like!" exclaimed Mrs. Powell, as she seated herself and resumed her work. "She's the most impertinent, high-tempered piece that ever I came across. But, never mind, my young tigress; I'll find means to tame you; and that before you've spent many weeks in my house."

The words were lost on Nina, for she was already half-way up-stairs; but little Essie, who had watched the whole scene in silent wonder and dismay, came to her mother's side, asking, with a quivering lip and eyes brimful of tears, "What, mamma? what will you do to Cousin Nina? poor Cousin Nina, that has no mamma or papa to love her?"

"Hush!" said her mother, sternly. "Nina is a very naughty girl; and if ever you talk to me as she did, I'll whip you till you can't stand. Yes, and I'll whip her, too, if she does n't behave herself."

"No, mamma; Essie is n't naughty! Essie will be good!" said the child, in a frightened tone.

"Then go back to your play, and don't be meddling with what does n't concern you," was the stern reply; and the child obeyed, furtively wiping away the tears her mother's harsh words and harsher tones had sent rolling down her cheeks.

Nina locked her door; and, lying down on the bed, presently cried herself to sleep, for it was late in the afternoon, and she was very weary with the unaccustomed labors of the

day, and also much exhausted by the storm of passion that had swept over her.

She slept long and heavily, and woke at length with a start, to find that it was night, as the stillness of the house and the darkness of the room, slightly relieved by the light of a street lamp reflected from the opposite wall, made evident.

She sprang up, groped for the matches, and, lighting the gas, hastily undressed herself and crept into bed. But she felt faint and weak from having gone without her supper, and thoroughly chilled by lying so long outside of the cover, for the nights had grown quite cool; and it was long before she could go to sleep again.

She rose when the rousing-bell rang, but, not feeling ready to comply with her aunt's conditions, did not go down in answer to either of the others. She was very hungry, and had begun to wonder if she was to be starved into submission, when Ann's shuffling step was at length heard in the passage, and opening the door, she walked in, carrying a tea-tray, which she set down on the window-sill before Nina, saying, "There's your breakfast, miss. It's not very good; but that's no fault of mine; for the mistress has everything her own way in this house, an' she says you'll not get nothing better till you'll do an' say what she bids you."

Nina's face flushed; for the tray contained nothing but a tumbler of water and a few slices of dry bread. Pride rebelled stoutly against accepting such fare; but hunger conquered; and only waiting till Ann had left the room, she ate what was set before her, and was surprised to find it taste so good.

She spent the whole day in her room, seeing no one but Ann, who brought up a fresh supply of the same sort of prison-fare at dinner and again at tea-time,—except once, when the door suddenly opened, and Sylvester put in his head and made faces at her.

"Oh, but you're a sweet one, a perfect angel; and have got a lovely temper of your own, too!" he said, in a jeering tone.

Nina was reading, and she sprang up and flung the book at him. He dodged it, and hastily withdrew his head. She rushed to the door, and locked it.

"Hateful boy!" she muttered, through her clenched teeth, as she stooped to pick up her book: "I wish I had hit him a good hard knock, to teach him better manners."

She grew very weary of her confinement and of her meagre fare, but felt no desire to join the family, of whom Essie was the only one she loved; while for the others—her uncle, perhaps, excepted—she already began to entertain a hearty dislike; and this feeling, united with pride, helped her to hold out for another day.

It was Sunday; and she sat by the window watching the people as they passed on their way to church, and thinking that she would like to be going with them, if it was only to get out into the air and the sunshine, and to see something of the city. Then she thought of Kizzie, in the dear old home, making her preparations to go to the little country church, where for so many years she had been a regular attendant. She seemed to see her, attired in her Sunday best, coming out of the front door and locking it behind her, passing along the gravelled path underneath those grand old trees, then through the gate and up the road that led past the spot that had become to Nina the most sacred on earth; perhaps pausing there for a brief space to drop a silent tear, or leave love's offering of a few sweet-scented flowers.

As fancy drew this picture, the child forgot everything else in a longing desire to be there beside those graves,—an intense longing for the living presence and the love of those whose dust slept beneath that sod; while with it there came over her as keen and overwhelming a sense of her irretrievable loss as in the first moment that she knew herself an orphan; and, bowing her head upon the window-seat, she burst into such bitter weeping as comes only from a heart well-nigh ready to break with its load of anguish.

The storm had partially spent itself; but tears were still

falling fast, and the childish bosom still heaved with sobs and sighs, when there came a soft little rap, as from a tiny fist, on her chamber-door, and a baby voice said sweetly, "Cousin Nina, let Essie in; Essie wants to see you."

It sent a thrill of gladness to the desolate young heart. Nina raised her head and, dashing away her tears, sprang to the door and opened it.

"May Essie come in?" asked the little one, looking up into her face with a bright, sweet smile.

"Yes, indeed, you darling! how good of you to come and see me!" was Nina's glad response, as she drew the child in and closed the door again. "How good of you to come!" she repeated, stooping down to clasp the little creature in her arms, and kiss her over and over again.

"You been a crying real hard, Cousin Nina. Poor Cousin Nina! what makes you cry? Essie's sorry for you," said the sweet baby voice; and a tiny hand was lifted to wipe away the tears that began to fall again in answer to her loving words of sympathy.

"I don't feel half so sad now you've come to tell me you are sorry for me," said Nina, hugging her close and closer still. "But won't your mamma scold you for coming up here to talk to me?"

"No; mamma's gone away to church, and papa too, and Homer and Syllie; and Ann and baby are gone to sleep; and Peggy is cross if Essie goes to talk to her in the kitchen. May Essie stay with you?"

"Yes, indeed, you little pet! I wish I could have you with me all the time."

"Tell Essie something; Essie likes stories. Tell her 'bout your papa and mamma, and your nice home," said the little one, coaxingly.

Nina's heart was full of tender recollections of her loved home and idolized parents, and it gave her the greatest happiness she could have known at that moment to be able to pour them all out into the ear of a sympathizing listener;

which Essie showed herself to be, in spite of her infant years.

And thus a half hour had glided very quickly away, when the loud ringing of the door-bell told that the family had returned from church, and, at the sound, Essie bade her cousin a hasty good-by, and hurried down-stairs, evidently fearing a reproof if found with her.

But, to Nina's great joy, she paid her a second visit in the afternoon, telling her that "everybody was gone to church but papa, who was taking care of baby; and he had said she might come, if she would n't say anything to mamma about it; and Essie won't," added the child; "cause may-be mamma would scold."

"Scold you, or scold papa?" Nina could not refrain from asking.

"Bofe of us," said Essie. "Mamma do scold real hard sometimes, and makes Essie cry."

"My dear mamma never scolded," said Nina, sighing.

The ringing of the door-bell was again the signal for the little visitor's departure; and Nina spent the rest of the day in solitude.

She was growing very weary of it; and reflection having made her sensible that she had been very impertinent to her aunt, and honestly owed her an apology, she had almost subdued her pride to the point of making it, when Mrs. Powell came in, on Monday morning, and told her that arrangements had been made for her to begin attending school that day; and that she should do so, if she would now comply with the conditions on which she might leave her room.

There was a moment's struggle with her pride and self-will, sustained by a consciousness of injustice in the treatment which had roused her passion and prompted the angry and rebellious words for which she was now required to make an apology, and then it came.

"I will ask your pardon, Aunt Comfort, because I know I did say words to you that I ought n't to have said, though you

were so unkind and unjust to me ; and I remember mamma used to say it was right and noble to acknowledge our faults, and mean and cowardly to refuse to do it. So I own it, and say I'm sorry, and don't mean to talk so again, if I can help it."

"Humph ! a pretty sort of an apology, truly, — almost as insulting as the fault it pretends to atone for," was Mrs. Powell's comment. "If I were not the most Christian and forgiving of women, you would be kept here another week on bread and water. But as it is, I pass it over, and give you permission to come down now and join the family at the breakfast."

The cold, hard tones, and the look which seemed to say, "You are the greatest of sinners, and I a woman the hem of whose garments you are hardly worthy to touch," roused again all Nina's ire and indignation ; and it was well for her that her aunt turned and left the room with her concluding sentence. Her very air and manner, as she did so, seemed to proclaim her exalted sense of her own superior goodness and worth. Perhaps she was not conscious how much the decision on which she was pluming herself had been influenced by the fact that it was not convenient to keep Nina confined to her room that day,—as Ann was needed to help with the washing, and would not have time to carry up her meals. Besides which, it would suit well to have Nina take charge of the little ones for an hour after breakfast.



## CHAPTER XI.

## NEW FRIENDS.

NINA did not follow her aunt immediately, but hung back for a little, striving hard for the mastery over the fiery temper which longed to give back scorn for scorn, and words of fierce anger and hate for looks of cold contempt and aversion. It was a hard-fought battle, and the victory was scarcely won when the breakfast-bell rang, and she knew she must go down at once.

Her uncle said "good-morning" to her in a pleasant tone as she took her place at the table, and Essie welcomed her with a bright, loving smile and a whispered "I so glad, Nina;" but her aunt took no notice of her whatever; and Sylvester's rude grimace and muttered "I guess you had to come to it at last, my lady," passed without reproof.

Nina's cheeks burned and her eyes flashed with indignation, roused quite as much by the cool nod Homer gave her, and the air of conscious superiority with which he drew himself up, as by the more open insult of his brother; and it required all the self-control of which she was mistress to refrain from speaking the passionate words that rose to her lips.

But her weariness of the close confinement she had endured for the last two days, — exceedingly irksome to one used to passing much of her time in the open air, roaming over hill and valley, field and woodland, at her own sweet will, — helped her to put a restraint upon her tongue, and after a little even to banish the angry expression from her countenance.

But the change from the silence and solitude of her own room to the companionship of the other members of the family did not strike her in the first half-hour, nor indeed at any time during the day, as worth the sacrifice of pride she

had made to obtain it. Mrs. Powell was never in an amiable mood on washing-day; and she now sat, stately and grim, behind the coffee-urn, not opening her lips except to administer a rebuke, in sharp, severe tones, to one or another of the children; while her husband, seeming to shrink within himself, scarcely raised his eyes from his plate, and the moment he had finished his meal, rose, pushed back his chair, and, with a few muttered words about "business hurrying him," hastily left the room.

Nina wished she dared to follow his example, for she had already eaten all she wanted of the uninviting breakfast, — stale bread, strong butter, and watery potatoes boiled in their skins. But Mrs. Powell's rule was that the children must sit at the table till she herself either rose from it or dismissed them; and Nina, not choosing to ask to be excused, sat still till her aunt and cousins had finished, when she was ordered to take the little ones to the sitting-room, and amuse them there until such time as she should be released from the task.

She made no objection, though her cheek flushed at her aunt's tone of command, — a tone to which she was little used; for her mother had been wont to put her directions in the form of a gently-spoken request.

Ann carried the baby up the stairs, and Nina followed, leading Essie, who seemed overjoyed to be with her cousin, and asked in an eager whisper for a repetition of all Nina had told her the day before about her old home.

Nina complied very willingly when she found she would have no other listeners. The time passed pleasantly; yet she was not sorry when her aunt came and told her to go to her room and make herself neat, as it was near the hour for school.

"Am I to go alone, Aunt Comfort?" she asked, as she returned to the sitting-room, with her hat on and her gloves in her hand.

"No, of course not, child; how should you know the way?" was the rather ungracious answer. "Homer will take you."

"I am ready, and there's no time to be lost," said Homer's

disagreeable voice at the door, and saying "good-bye" to her aunt, Nina followed him down the stairs, putting on her gloves as she went.

It was a bright, beautiful October morning, — the air clear and bracing, even in the city, and, with a pleasant companion, Nina would have enjoyed her walk; especially as there was much to be seen that was new and strange to the little country-girl. But Homer, with his cold, proud bearing, and air of conscious superiority, was anything else than agreeable. After one glance at him, Nina drew herself up in the most dignified manner, and, turning her face from him, walked on with stately step and in unbroken silence.

They had gone several squares before either of them spoke; then Homer began a lecture on behavior, which he wound up by remarking that he hoped she would not disgrace herself and them by any such display of temper as she had made to his mother a few days ago.

"Never fear that I will disgrace myself," said Nina, with a proud toss of her head; "but as to disgracing you, Mr. Homer, I'd rather do it than not. But I never get into a passion with those who treat me well; and all the teachers I ever went to have been real good to me."

"I'm sure, Miss Nina, that my mother has been far better to you than you deserve," he answered, in her own freezing tones; and Nina, giving him a scornful look, remarked:

"You're exactly like her."

"Thank you," he said, with a bow of mock courtesy. "I take it as a compliment, though I understand very well that it was not meant as such; but I consider my mother as an almost perfect pattern of all that a Christian lady should be."

"Then I never want to be a Christian!" exclaimed Nina, with more candor than discretion. "I'd a million times rather be like my own dear mamma, who was n't a Christian at all."

"You're an ungrateful, wicked girl," he said; "foolish,

too; and don't know what's good for you. But here's the school, and you're to go in at that door. You may introduce yourself; for I shall take no more trouble for a girl who speaks so ill of my mother."

"I can do it!" she replied, looking after him as he walked away and left her.

Nina was neither a forward nor a bashful child; but blessed with a large share of quiet self-possession, seldom felt troubled by timidity or nervousness. She did not care very much for being left alone now. Homer's company was hardly better than none, she thought; and she could go in alone and introduce herself to the teacher.

She did so, and was kindly received and assigned a seat beside a sunny-faced, blue-eyed lassie about her own age.

The child bestowed many a friendly glance and smile upon Nina, while study and recitation were the order of the day; pitying looks, too, as she noticed the deep mourning dress; and the moment recess was announced, Nina's hand was seized with a cordial "How do you do? I'm so glad you've come to sit with me! I know I shall like you. My name's Diadema Tripp; what's yours?"

"Nina Clemmens."

"Nina? What an odd name!"

"Not half so odd as yours, I think," said Nina, smiling; "where did you get it?"

"Oh, I don't know: mother she found it somewheres, — in a book, I guess, — and she liked it. My big sister's named Oriana, and the little one's Dora; and I've two big brothers, — Max and Colin."

The two made acquaintance very rapidly, and in the course of the conversation discovered that they were quite near neighbors. Mr. Tripp kept a grocery and provision store on a corner scarcely half a square from Mr. Powell's. The families attended the same church, too, and knew a good deal about each other, but did not visit, — Mrs. Powell considering herself quite above "those low, uneducated, vulgar Tripps."

They were uneducated and not very refined, but exceedingly kind-hearted and hospitable, and, very fortunately for Nina, soon took a deep interest in her, and invited her often to their well-spread table, treating her with a cordiality and affection which, in her eyes, at least, fully atoned for the lack of the education and polish that would have made them altogether congenial to her. Ignorance of or disregard for the rules of etiquette, grammar, and rhetoric seemed to her far more excusable than self-righteousness, harshness, ill-temper, and parsimony: and, indeed, she sometimes found a good deal of quiet amusement in listening to the odd use of words indulged in by her new friends, — Mrs. Tripp in particular.

And Mrs. Powell allowed her to visit them frequently, not from any desire to gratify either them or the child, but as a stroke of economy. Her own table was never very bountifully supplied, and every meal Nina ate elsewhere was just so much gain: for was not a penny saved always a penny gained? and did not pence oft heaped amount to pounds? Two proverbs not seldom upon her lips.

So Nina had many a happy hour with the Tripps. Many such at school also, where she soon became a great favorite with both teachers and fellow-pupils; none of them ever dreaming that she had such a temper as was considered by Mrs. Powell her chief characteristic. The first three days of Nina's life in her aunt's family were a fair specimen of the whole. Essie was the one bright spot, the one bit of sunshine, of comfort and happiness there — all the rest weariness and vexation of spirit. Her uncle liked her, but did not venture to show her much kindness. Homer and Sylvester made themselves altogether disagreeable; and Mrs. Powell continued to be, as at first, stern, cold, and exacting; yet not very much more so to Nina than to her own children, who seemed to fear far more than they loved her. Her parsimony, and her extreme neatness and particularity, made every one uncomfortable, from her husband down. To bring in the smallest amount of dust or mud on your shoes, to drop a crumb

on the carpet, to leave a chair out of its appointed place in a line with the wall, or a book, or newspaper, or bit of sewing on the table, or to step on the carpet instead of the oil-cloth in going up or down stairs, were one and all great crimes in her eyes, never to be passed over without rebuke; and if committed by the children, seldom escaped punishment.

And Nina, careless by nature, and hitherto accustomed to as perfect freedom as a judiciously indulgent mother could accord, could scarcely brook what seemed to her the intolerable thralldom of such rules, and was continually bringing herself into disgrace by forgetting or neglecting them.

Then, too, Mrs. Powell was ever, as on that first day, very exacting in regard to the employment of time, especially of Nina's. She seemed either to forget or utterly ignore the fact that children need a certain amount of play, and was constantly preaching to the little girl on the duty of being always usefully occupied, and the great wickedness of wasting time; and the child no sooner came in from school than she would set her down to her lessons for the next day, or to some sewing; or, if Ann was otherwise engaged, bid her take charge of the little ones. Nina would bear it till it seemed no longer endurable; then there would be an indignant outbreak,—a battle in which she was, of course, finally the vanquished party; when for a time she would submit again from very weariness of contention.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### A YOUNG TIGRESS.

ONE Saturday afternoon, after having been, as usual, kept hard at work all the morning, Nina was sent on an errand for her aunt that gave her a walk of several miles,—a very disagreeable and fatiguing one, for the pavements were

slippery with ice and snow, and, as she returned, a keen, cold wind blew directly in her face nearly all the way. The child was completely worn out, and found it utterly impossible to keep her eyes open that evening during Mr. Powell's monotonous reading of a very long chapter of genealogies, and the equally monotonous and still longer prayer that followed; and when the others rose from their knees she remained upon hers, while her audible breathing told plainly why she had not copied their example.

The boys exchanged glances, and Sylvester laughed aloud.

"Hush!" said his mother, sternly, as Nina, roused by the sound of his mirth, rose hastily to her feet and looked about her in some confusion; "don't laugh at such sinful conduct. Nina, I am astonished!" she went on, turning to the delinquent, and speaking with great severity of tone and manner. "You have been sleeping while Mr. Powell was praying, and the rest of us uniting with him. *Sleeping in prayer-time!* I never heard of anything so wicked! Why, it absolutely frightens me! I almost expect to see the roof fall in, and bury us all in the ruins."

"I could n't help it," muttered Nina, hanging her head, while her cheeks crimsoned with mortification: "I was so tired, my eyes *would n't* stay open."

"Tired!" exclaimed her aunt. "I should like to know what you've had to tire you? But go up to your bed this minute: we've had quite enough of you for to-night."

The child's sympathies had been strongly excited that morning for a poor seamstress who had brought home some shirts she had been making for Mr. Powell,—a pale, weary-looking little woman, who went away sobbing because of the pitiful sum paid her for her work, and the cold, harsh words and tones with which her pleading for a more just remuneration had been denied. Nina had felt deeply for her; and now, as she obeyed her aunt's order, and went slowly and wearily up the stairs, she muttered to herself, "I don't think it was half so wicked as paying that poor woman such a mean little bit for

her work, and then talking so crossly to her, besides. I'm sure that was wicked, and mean, too. Mamma always said it was wicked to be cross, particularly to folks who were poor and in trouble."

The next day Nina was told that "she must stay at home and take care of the children, while all the rest went to church: she was too wicked to go there or to Sunday-school; a girl who could fall asleep in prayer-time was not fit to enjoy such privileges."

She listened in silence to the cold, cutting reproof, and turned away with an air of indifference, presently remarking "that she did n't consider it any great pleasure or privilege to go to church or Sunday-school, and would about as lief stay at home as not."

"Then you're even more hardened in sin than I took you to be," said her aunt, severely; "and I'm really afraid there's very little hope of a girl who can feel and act and talk as you do, after so many weeks spent in the bosom of this Christian family. What do you think, Thomas?"

"Why, I—I'm afraid you're right, Comfort, as you generally are," he answered, in a half-hesitating way.

Nina's temper was rising, and she hastily ran out of the room, lest she should not be able to keep back the angry words she was longing to speak.

It was an unhappy beginning of a very unhappy week. Monday was a dreary day, and everybody in the house seemed to be in a bad humor. Mrs. Powell scolded more than was usual with her, even on wash-day; the little ones cried and fretted; Homer was more conscious than ever of his own vast superiority to Nina, and took special pains to make it evident to her; while Sylvester teased her; and she lost her temper so completely, that she was sent away from the breakfast-table before she had half finished her meal.

She was on her way up-stairs to get ready for school when her aunt called her into her room, and read her a long lecture on her wickedness, her bad temper, and the great crime she



had committed in falling asleep during prayers on Saturday night, winding up by saying, "You are certainly the most depraved child I ever saw. I don't believe you will ever come to any good; and yet it is very surprising to me that you could have lived so long in this house, beholding day after day the very Christian example that Mr. Powell, Homer, and I set before you, without showing any desire to copy it."

Nina had stood with folded arms and downcast eyes, listening in silent attention through the whole of the lengthened harangue, — delivered in Mrs. Powell's most disagreeable tones, — her cheeks growing redder and redder, and her lips more and more tightly compressed with each unkind accusation, each harsh epithet bestowed upon her. But as Mrs. Powell pronounced these last words, then paused for breath, the smouldering fires suddenly burst into flame.

"Aunt Comfort," cried the child, lifting her head and looking her full in the face, with kindling eyes, while her lip curled with scorn and contempt, "it seems to me you are exactly like that Pharisee your minister preached about the other Sunday, — a proud man, who thought himself so good that he prayed, 'God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are;' and you're just as much mistaken as he was. Bad as you think I am, I would n't for the world treat anybody as you did that poor woman on Saturday. You did n't pay her half what her work was worth, you know you did n't; and you gave her the crossest words besides, when you might just as well have said something kind and pleasant; and I'm sure all that was a great deal worse than for me to fall asleep in worship, when I was so tired I *could n't* keep my eyes open. I'm not good, I know; but I would n't be as wicked and proud and self-righteous as you are, for anything."

The words were poured forth in such a torrent that there was no stopping her till she had said her say.

Mrs. Powell rose to her feet, white and speechless with rage, and, seizing the child by the shoulder, shook her till her teeth chattered and her head swam so, that, as her aunt loosened

her hold, she was obliged to catch at the bed-post to save herself from falling.

“I’ve had enough of this impudence, and I’ll teach you to give me no more of it!” exclaimed Mrs. Powell, finding her tongue at last; and she left the room.

She was gone several minutes, which gave Nina time to recover from her giddiness, though by no means from her passion, and that rose to a fearful height as her aunt returned with a switch in her hand, and the evident intention of using it upon her.

“Aunt Comfort,” she cried, in a tone of concentrated fury, “if you touch me with that, you’ll be sorry for it.”

“I guess you’ll find that you’ll be the sorry one,” replied Mrs. Powell, moving rapidly toward her with the whip raised in one hand, while she attempted to lay hold of the child’s arm with the other.

But Nina was too quick for her, and, springing nimbly aside, avoided both the seizure and the intended blow.

“You’ll not get away from me, or escape the sound whipping I mean to give you; you need n’t think it,” said Mrs. Powell, through her shut teeth, as she darted after her, and again tried to catch hold of her arm.

Nina made no reply, but suddenly faced about toward her aunt, seized the switch, jerked it out of her hand, broke it in two, and threw it into the fire. Then straightening herself up, and looking Mrs. Powell full in the face, “You’d better not try that again,” she said. “I’m too old for such punishment, and I won’t submit to it. Neither papa nor mamma ever struck me in their lives, and they never allowed anybody else to. They did n’t approve of whipping children, especially girls; and so you’ve no right to do it.”

“I have a right to punish you in any way I think proper; and I shall do it, too. My sister did not do her duty by you, or she would have broken this high spirit of yours long ago, and I should have had less trouble with you now.”

“You’d better not try to strike me. I’ll fight you if you do; and I’m very strong when I’m angry.”

“Very well, then; I’ll turn you over to Mr. Powell, and you’ll find that you are not nearly as strong as a man. Go to your room. You shall stay there for a week, at least, on bread and water. Go!”

“Anywhere to get away from you, Aunt Comfort,” was the saucy rejoinder; and Nina vanished.

Rushing up to her own room, she locked herself in, and paced to and fro like a caged lioness, clenching her small, white fists till the nails were almost buried in the palm, and muttering angrily to herself through her shut teeth, “The wicked, wicked wretch! How dare she say such hateful things to me, and then try to whip me for getting angry; to *whip* me, as if I were a boy or a dog! What would mamma have said? She would have been as angry as I am. Oh, mamma, mamma, darling mamma!” And anger was for the time swallowed up in grief, as she threw herself on the bed, weeping and sobbing as though her poor little heart would break.

She wept herself to sleep at length, for she had been a good deal overworked in the last few weeks, and passion had exhausted much of her remaining strength.

The dinner-bell roused her. She woke with a start and a shiver, for the room was cold, and she had been lying outside of the bed with no covering over her. She jumped up, got her cloak and put it on, then seated herself by the window, resting her elbow on the sill and her head on her hand, while thinking over the morning’s stormy interview with her aunt, and considering what she should do in case the threat of handing her over to Mr. Powell for punishment was carried out.

“I don’t care if she does,” she muttered to herself. “He’s nobody to be afraid of; and he’ll not *dare* to touch *me*.”

Her cheek crimsoned and her dark eye flashed at the very thought.

“But he’ll not do it!” she went on muttering to herself between her clenched teeth. “Oh, but I’d be furious, if he did. I think I could like to kill him for it!”

Then she shuddered, and hid her face in terror at the thought, "What if I ever should do such an awful thing as that! Oh, I must try to rule my temper; for I remember that mamma used to tell me of people that did do such dreadful things because they let themselves get so angry, just as I did this morning."

Some one tried the door, and Ann's voice was heard, saying, "Here's your dinner, Miss Nina."

"Bread and water, of course. Well, that's better than nothing; so I'll open the door."

Ann stood before it with a slice of bread and a tumbler of water on a small tea-tray, which she handed to Nina. As she did so, Mr. Powell pushed her aside, and stepped past her and Nina into the room, much to the surprise of the latter; for he was in slippers, and had come up the stairs and approached her door with so light and cautious a tread that she had not heard him.

He shut the door; and Ann, hearing her mistress summoning her from below, shuffled away as fast as possible, though longing to stay and listen to what would follow.

Mr. Powell had come up very much against his will. He liked Nina in spite of her temper, and was really not at all sorry that she had baffled his wife's attempt to whip her. He was no great believer in corporal punishment for girls, except perhaps in their very earliest years; and if he had dared to assert his marital authority, he would have forbidden his wife to try anything of the kind again. But alas, he had not even spirit and independence enough to insist upon his right to control his own actions, and refuse to interfere in the matter. Mrs. Powell had ordered him to go to Nina, and at least threaten her with condign punishment at his hands, unless she promised passive submission to it from hers; and though hating the task with all his heart, he had not ventured to refuse to obey. And now he shrank before the glance of Nina's flashing eye, as she turned and looked at him with compressed lips and heightened color, after setting down her tray upon the wash-stand.

Neither spoke for a moment; then Mr. Powell stammered out, "I—I was very sorry, very sorry, indeed, to—to hear of your—your misconduct this morning, Nina."

"Were you?" she said quietly, folding her arms and looking steadily into his face. "I hope you were sorry to hear of Aunt Comfort's behavior also. She said some very dreadful things to me."

He gave her a glance of surprise, then looked past her at the wall, fidgeted a little, cleared his throat, and began again.

"I did n't come here to discuss your aunt's words or actions, but yours. I am sorry to be obliged to say that I think you behaved very ill this morning, as well as the other evening when you went to sleep in prayer-time."

"I could n't help going to sleep; I never can help it when I'm so worn out. Aunt Comfort had kept me on my feet all day; and I think it was more her fault than mine that I went to sleep."

"Come," he said, speaking with some spirit, "let me hear no more of that! You seem to be throwing all the blame of your faults upon your aunt, and I will not hear it. But you deserved the punishment she meant to inflict upon you this morning, and you ought to have submitted to it. She is mistress in this house, and I cannot allow any rebellion against her authority, and so, if you will not submit to be punished by her, I shall be obliged to take you in hand."

He spoke very fast, as if fearful that his courage might evaporate before he had said all that was necessary, and Nina had sense enough to perceive it.

"You will never do that, Uncle Thomas, you know you won't," she said, drawing herself up to her full height and giving him a haughty glance out of her kindling eyes. "You would not be so unmanly as to lay a finger on a little girl like me—a little girl who will soon be a woman, and who has no father or brother to defend her; and you would never have come up here to say such things to me if you had n't

been afraid to say 'No' to Aunt Comfort when she ordered you."

He could not gainsay the truth of her assertions, and coloring with anger and mortification, he turned about and left the room, merely saying, in a threatening tone, "You had better not try me."

Nina drew a long breath, ran to the door and locked it after him, and, returning, sat down to her scanty meal.

She tasted nothing but bread and water, and saw no one but Ann, for the rest of the week.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN.

ONE evening, shortly before Christmas, Nina was sent to the dining-room to pare apples to be made into pies for the next day's dinner. She went into the kitchen to get a knife, and found Peggy standing at the ironing-table hard at work upon a little white dress, with which she was taking the utmost pains.

"How tired you look, Peggy," said Nina, in a compassionate tone; "why don't you put that away till morning, and sit down now and rest a little?"

"Because there'll be plenty of work to-morrow without this; and because Mrs. Powell insists on having the ironing finished to-night: she won't have it about any longer, she says," Peggy answered, querulously. "She's a hard mistress, is Comfort Powell, (she got the wrong name, I'm sure, if anybody ever did,) and has no mercy on folks that are so misfortunate as to have her work to do."

"That dress must be a good deal of trouble to do up, is n't it?" remarked Nina, lingering a moment to watch the skilful movements of Peggy's iron.

“You may well say that when you look at all these ruffles,” said the old woman, with a weary sigh; “but it’s white; there’s not a particle of gay color about it; so it’s no sin to have it made this way, though it does break my back to iron it, and though it cost hours of Mrs. Powell’s valuable time to make it,” she went on, in a bitter, mocking tone; “and it’s no sin, either, for her to stint us all in our victuals, and lay out the money she saves in expensive dresses and shawls, and the like, for herself, always provided the colors are plain and quiet; but it’s a wicked thing for anybody to wear a bit of bright ribbon, or gay colored flowers or feathers in her bonnet, as you’ll find out one of these days, when you put off your mourning.”

“Yes. I heard her talking very hard about some of the ladies we see at church, because they wear such things; and I remember hearing somebody else talking that way to mamma once, and how she told her that God made the clouds and the flowers bright and gay, and so it could n’t be wicked for us to like pretty, bright colors, or to wear them, either. But I must hurry, or I’ll not get my apples pared by bedtime.”

Ten minutes more might have passed, and Nina’s knife and fingers were moving nimbly round and round the rosy apple which she held in her hand, while several others, divested of their bright covering, lay in the deep dish before her on the table. She glanced at the clock on the mantel. “Twenty minutes of eight,” she murmured to herself; “I must make haste, or I’ll not get done by quarter-past, as Aunt Comfort said I must, and what a scolding I’ll catch if I’m not. Hark! What was that? I think there’s somebody at the gate, and Peggy does n’t seem to hear; may-be it’s only the wind, though; for how it does blow, and keep the windows rattling and the shutters banging. No, there *is* somebody knocking.” And she jumped up, set her pan of parings on the table, and hastened to the kitchen-door.

“Peggy, there’s somebody at the gate, I’m sure. I’ve

heard two raps. Do please go and see who it is. It's too cold to keep anybody waiting outside to-night."

"It's only a beggar; and they're the plague of my life; for I'm never allowed to give 'em anything," grumbled Peggy, setting down her iron and going to answer the knock, while Nina went back to her work.

A slender female figure, wrapped in a blanket-shawl and hood, glided quickly in the instant the gate was opened, and, as the astonished Peggy hastily shot the bolt again and turned to ask her errand, she suddenly sank upon her knees on the pavement, letting fall a bundle which she carried in her arms, and lifting her face and her clasped hands with a gesture of almost despairing entreaty.

"Mother!" she gasped, "don't spurn me! don't bid me begone, or it will break my heart!"

"Margaret! My child!" cried the old woman, sinking down beside her, and falling on her neck with a burst of tears and sobs.

For several minutes they remained clasped in each other's arms, mingling their tears and sobs and exchanging mute caresses; then the daughter rose, lifting her mother up, and saying, in sad, tremulous tones, "I must go now; for you will catch your death of cold if I keep you out here any longer. But oh, mother, I did not dare hope to be received so. I thought you would spurn me from you, and curse me for the shame and disgrace my folly and sin have brought upon you. But you forgive me? You do forgive me, and love me still?"

"Yes, child, yes. I know, I've always known, that you were more sinned against than sinning, and my old heart has been e'en a most broke with the longing to see my darling again. And I can't let you go yet, Margie: come in."

"No, mother; *she* would drive me out if she found me there, and may-be turn you adrift, too. I must go."

"Not yet. She's in her own room at a piece of work that'll keep her busy all the evening. So come in. I can't let you go yet; and we'll freeze, if we stand outside any longer."



The girl yielded; for she was hungry for a better view of her mother's face than she could get out there in the darkness, and longing to pour out into her mother's bosom the whole sad history of her sins and sorrows, and to tell of her repentance, and the sweet hope that she had been forgiven. She picked up her bundle, and softly they stole in, softly closed the door and seated themselves by the fire; the girl on the floor, with her head in her mother's lap, the old woman bending over her, and stroking her hair with a trembling hand, while with many sobs and tears the poor outcast unburdened her heart to the one earthly friend she possessed.

Nina wondered much at the strange sounds which reached her from the kitchen—murmured words, sighs, moans, and sobs; but had too much delicacy to intrude upon the private interview she supposed Peggy was having with some friend or acquaintance. But the clock struck eight, and the girl started to her feet.

“Mother, I must go,” she said; “for what if she should come and catch me here.”

“Not yet; I can't let you go yet,” said Peggy, in eager, tearful tones, while she clung convulsively to her.

“Oh, but I must!” cried the girl. “For your sake I must go before she finds out that I am here. This bundle is for you, mother,—my Christmas gift. You know Christmas comes day after to-morrow. It's some flannels I've made to help your rheumatism.”

“It is very good in you to think of it, Margie, and to do it, and they'll be very comfortable; but why did you spend your money on me, child?” said Peggy, examining the garments with tearful pleasure; “you'll need it all yourself.”

“No, mother,” she answered, turning away her face, “the days of greed for finery are past with me, and the few clothes I must have don't cost much; and I'm getting tolerably good wages.”

The door into the dining-room was suddenly thrown open at that instant, and Mrs. Powell stood on the threshold,

glaring upon the two with an expression of mingled rage and scorn.

“How dare you!” she cried, addressing Peggy; “how dare you pollute my house with the presence of such a vile wretch as that?” and she pointed her finger at Margaret’s cowering, shrinking form; “and you, you who have brought disgrace upon an honest name, how dare you venture to cross my threshold? Begone this instant, and never dare to darken my doors again! You have sinned past forgiveness, and can expect no good, pure Christian woman to hold any intercourse whatever with you; your very presence is polluting. Begone!”

“I will go,” said the girl humbly, rising and wrapping her shawl more closely about her as she spoke. “I ought not to have come in here without your permission, but the temptation of a half hour with my mother was too great to be resisted —”

“It is not the first temptation you have found so,” sneered Mrs. Powell, interrupting her; “you are a weak, wicked girl.”

“I am,” was the meek reply, while the girl’s head drooped, and her cheek was suffused with blushes; “but, oh, you are mistaken in saying I have sinned past forgiveness; for He whose servant you say you are, He has forgiven me, and bid me go in peace, and sin no more,” she added, raising her clasped hands and streaming eyes to heaven; “and if He has forgiven me, cannot you? If He permits me to draw near to Him, cannot you allow me sometimes to come into your kitchen to say a few words to the mother who bore me, and then go away again without troubling you?”

“Never!” cried Mrs. Powell, waving her away. “Begone this instant, or I will send for the police.”

The girl obeyed; Peggy following her, and giving her a silent, tearful embrace ere she closed the gate upon her.

Mrs. Powell still stood by the ironing-table as the old woman re-entered the kitchen, and a more grim visage, or

harder, colder face, poor Peggy had never looked upon. She sighed deeply as she closed the door, and turned to meet the storm that she knew awaited her. Sinking into a chair, she folded her wrinkled, toil-hardened hands in her lap, and bowed her gray head upon her bosom in an attitude of utter weariness and despondency that few of her sex could have looked upon unmoved; but of those few, Mrs. Powell was one. Not a muscle of her cold, stern face relaxed, and her voice had never been harsher than now, as she emptied the vials of her wrath upon the devoted head of her ancient serving-woman.

Nina heard it all, and was filled with astonishment and indignation, both at her aunt's fury and Peggy's passive endurance of her abuse.

For many minutes she bore it in silence; but at length, as the virago paused for breath, the bowed head was lifted, and the cold, gray eyes looked steadfastly into hers, as their owner replied, in tones tremulous with age, weakness, and excitement, "Comfort Powell, you're a hard woman, and a hard life I've led with you these two years, treated like a slave,—though your husband's next of kin after you and his children."

"A fact which, according to our agreement, was never to be mentioned," returned Mrs. Powell, severely. "You are a most ungrateful creature. Many would have cast you off entirely after all that has happened, while I give you an asylum in my house, in spite of the disgrace your children—ruined by your indulgence—have brought upon the family. You ought to be thankful, cheerful, and contented; but instead of that you are forever fretting and complaining; and nothing but my Christian kindness and forbearance has kept me from sending you adrift long ago."

"Stay," said Peggy, in a tone of contempt and incredulity, "I think there's another motive you're forgetting to mention. You know very well you could not get anybody else to slave from morning to night, day in and day out, as I do, for

the mean pittance you give me. You're a hard mistress, I say again, Comfort Powell. You've no bowels of compassion at all; no feeling for an old woman bowed down with trouble; you never care how tired, or how full of aches and pains I am, or how heavy my heart is, but go on, day after day, heaping work on me till I'm ready to drop. You have no sympathy for the bitter grief and shame that has made my life a burden and a curse to me," she added, rocking herself to and fro, and moaning as if in pain.

"There, that will do," said her mistress; "if I served you right, I would tell you to take your things and go, and never darken my doors again. But I am forbearing. Your ironing, I see, is not yet done, and you are wasting fire keeping the irons hot. Get up and finish your work at once, and then go to bed and rest. And let me hope that morning will find you in a more reasonable frame of mind."

So saying, she turned about and walked into the dining-room. She started at sight of Nina, whose presence there she had entirely forgotten. The child had finished paring the apples, and was now coring and slicing them.

"So you have heard all this?" remarked Mrs. Powell, in a tone of annoyance and displeasure; "and I suppose will be repeating it all to those Tripps. But if you do," she added, threateningly, "mind, you'll spend a month shut up in your room on bread and water."

"Aunt Comfort," replied Nina, with dignity, "I don't reveal family secrets. Mamma taught me long ago that it was foolish and wrong and mean to do so. But if you've no objection, I should like to know what that girl has done so bad that she can't be forgiven."

"I shall not indulge your curiosity," was the short, sharp answer. "Those apples will do now; wash your hands and go to your books."

## CHAPTER XIV.

## A PATTERN BOY.

**K**IND-HEARTED Mrs. Tripp, learning that there were to be no "Christmas doings" at Mrs. Powell's, sent an invitation for Nina to spend the holidays with them. There was a partial acceptance,—Nina obtaining permission to go to her friends early on the afternoon of the twenty-fourth, and stay until eight o'clock on Christmas evening.

She had a very pleasant time, and received a few little gifts, among which was a volume of fairy tales from Max.

Homer was sent for her at the appointed hour, and very reluctantly she obeyed the summons.

There was no one to give her a pleasant greeting as she came in, or to ask if she had enjoyed her visit. Mr. Powell was out, Essie and the baby had been put to bed, and Mrs. Powell and Sylvester were the only occupants of the room; the latter sitting in sullen silence, with his hands in his pockets, moody and cross because he had no Christmas gifts, and "home was such a dull, stupid place, with no fun going on, and nothing to do but work or study;" and the former, silent also, grim and cold as usual, her countenance expressing conscious rectitude and superiority to the weaknesses and failings of ordinary mortals, as she sat bolt upright before a pile of stockings that lay upon the table; some, already mended, carefully rolled up and laid by themselves, others awaiting that process, and one drawn over her left hand, while with her right she sent her darning-needle up and down, back and forth, with surprising swiftness and energy.

"Well, miss, I hope you have had play enough for awhile," she remarked, as Nina entered. "Go up to your room and put away your things; then bring your work-basket, and mend these stockings of yours."

Nina obeyed with a sigh. Stocking-darning was very distasteful to her, and had never seemed more so than at this moment; for the summons to return home had obliged her to break off in the middle of a most enchanting fairy tale, leaving the heroine in a position of imminent peril, from which she was extremely anxious to see her rescued.

An hour was spent over the hated task, and then she was ordered off to bed. But this time she ventured to disobey. Her room was uncomfortably cold, but she wrapped herself up, and finished her book; then hastily undressed, put out the gas, and crept into bed, thinking no one knew, or would ever know, that she had not been there an hour earlier. But she had never been more mistaken.

Homer's dislike to his cousin led him to be ever on the watch to get her into trouble, nor was he over-scrupulous in regard to the means he used. He had seen the light shining under the door, and took care to report it to his mother the first thing in the morning.

As usual, Nina was left in charge of the little ones while her aunt went to market. She brought down her new book for their amusement, and was showing the pictures to Essie and telling her the stories, when suddenly the door opened and Mrs. Powell stalked in, looking like a thunder-cloud.

"What is this?" she asked, in tones of stern displeasure, as she snatched the book from Nina's hands, and gave her a look that, had it been a dagger or a spear, would have transfixed her on the spot. "What is this? Where did you get it? How dare you bring it in here and show it to my child?"

"It is one of my Christmas gifts. I got it at Mrs. Tripp's, and I thought I was doing a kindness to the children to bring it down and show it to them," replied Nina, recovering from the surprise that had made her dumb for the moment.

"Fairy tales!" cried Mrs. Powell, with increasing indignation, as she hastily turned over the leaves, scanning them with a reproving eye; "fairy tales! I forbid story-books of

any and every kind, and fairy tales are the worst of all: made up of falsehoods, lies! I'll have no such pernicious literature brought into my house, or read by any one under my authority. I shall confiscate this book, and sell it for waste paper, or commit it to the flames."

"You have no right!" cried Nina, jumping up and facing round upon her aunt, with flashing eyes and cheeks crimsoned with passion; "it is *my* book, *mine*; and you shall not destroy it or sell it. Mr. Max Tripp gave it to me, and it is *mine*!"

"What impertinence, and what a wicked temper; awfully wicked!" said Homer, who had followed Mrs. Powell into the room, and now stood regarding the culprit with an expression of righteous indignation. "She's enough to bring down a judgment on the house, with her fearful temper, her love of bad books, and her sly acts of disobedience. Mother, are you going to put up with it all, — return her that book, which she claims so impudently, and let her insolence, disobedience, and all her misdeeds go unpunished?"

"Certainly not! I hope I understand my duty far better than that," Mrs. Powell answered, drawing herself up and speaking with dignified severity. "Nina is indeed insolent, disobedient, and passionate, and must be treated in a manner to bring her to a sense of her guilt, and contrition on account of it. Why, miss, did you not go to your bed at nine last night, as you were bid? What were you doing with the gas blazing high after ten o'clock? Reading this book, without doubt, for which you deserve to be deprived of it, even if it was such as I could approve, instead of the pernicious stuff it is."

"I'm not sly! I hate slyness and mean tale-telling," cried Nina, with a glance of concentrated scorn and contempt directed at Homer. "I'd blush to look any honorable person in the face if I'd ever been guilty of listening at key-holes or peeping through cracks, and then telling what I found out in such a mean, shameful way! And I'd like to

know, Aunt Comfort, if you call it honest to take other people's property and keep it? That book is mine, and you have no right to it."

"I'll have no more of this insolence!" exclaimed Mrs. Powell, catching hold of the child, and shaking her. "I'll show you whether I have a right to the book or not. You'll never see it again, I promise you; and your disobedience and impertinence shall not escape punishment. You will go now to your own room, which you will not leave during the remainder of the holidays; and bread and water shall be your only refreshment while your imprisonment lasts."

Homer heard the sentence with intense satisfaction, which he vainly tried to conceal by an assumed expression of regret that his cousin's depravity should have rendered such severity necessary. A shallow pretence that Nina saw through at a glance, and treated with the contempt it deserved.

Slowly and in indignant silence she moved to obey the cruel order. But at the door she paused for an instant, and turned about so as to face her tormentors.

"I'd like to know, Aunt Comfort," she said, "how much you charge for my board when you feed me on bread and water for a week at a time, and keep me in the cold besides? And I'd like to know, too, if you think it's keeping your promise to mamma to treat me so? She would not have been so cruel to a cat or a dog; and neither would I."

"Oh, mamma, don't send cousin away," sobbed little Essie, who had retreated into a corner at her mother's entrance, and had been crying bitterly there ever since. "Do let her stay and show me the pretty pictures."

"Hush, Esther!" commanded her mother, sternly. "And you, Nina, leave the room this instant, or I'll send Homer for a rod, and have him hold you while I apply it."

Nina rushed away to her room, speechless with indignation at a threat so outrageous; while Homer remarked, with a low chuckle, "I wish you would, mother; I'd really enjoy seeing you tame the young tigress. To think of the impudence she has given us both! I never heard anything like it!"



Mrs. Powell left the room without answering, and Homer followed, ostensibly for the purpose of asking further directions about an errand she had bidden him do, but really to take note of her disposition of the book, which he was longing to examine for himself. She threw it far back on the topmost shelf of the closet in her room, turned and answered his question, and then went down-stairs to give Peggy her orders for the day, bidding him "have an eye on the little ones" until her return.

He said, "Yes, ma'am," in a dutiful tone, and moved toward the sitting-room, as if to obey; but as soon as she was safely in the kitchen, he ran back on tiptoe to the room they had just left, secured the forbidden book, and put it in his pocket. He then hastened down to the sitting-room, where his mother found him, a few minutes later, taking most exemplary care of his little sisters.

A few days afterwards the book was returned to its hiding-place unharmed; but before relinquishing it, the pattern boy had eagerly devoured every word of its contents.

It was the natural and inevitable result of Mrs. Powell's over-strictness, and denial of *all* amusements, that her children would take them by stealth.

The week was a very long one to poor Nina; though Ann, who liked the child, and heartily disliked her mistress, managed to smuggle into the little girl's room various story-books, and pieces of cake and pie, all of which were furnished by the Tripps, to whom she had carried the tale of Nina's imprisonment, and who heard it with much indignation.

"I don't approve of encouraging children in disobedience, or sauciness, either," said kind-hearted Mrs. Tripp; "but I do think Mrs. Powell's entirely too hard with that poor, motherless child; and I can't bear to think of her bein' shut up in that cold room, and with nothing to amuse her, and nothing but dry bread to eat day after day, while other folks are having such good times. So I'll send her whatever I can to hearten her up, and hope I'm not a doin' wrong, which I

don't believe I am ; anyway, it's what I'd like to have done for a child of mine, if she was in the same fix. But what on earth makes Mrs. Powell dislike her so ? She's a unanimous favorite with other folks."

"May-be she does n't dislike her," remarked Oriana.

"Nonsense," said her mother ; " don't actions speak louder than words ? "

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## CHAPTER XV.

### PETTICOAT GOVERNMENT.

THERE 'S a letter for you, Mrs. Powell, and one for Miss Nina," said Ann, handing them to her mistress, and going back to her work.

Mrs. Powell glanced at the address, looked at the post-mark, which was the same on each, opened hers and read it, treated Nina's in like manner, then deliberately folded the two, and, consigning them to her pocket, took up her sewing again, and for several minutes went on with it as before, her face wearing its usual cold, calm, self-satisfied expression.

She was in the sitting-room and alone, for it was the middle of the forenoon : her husband was away at his business, the older children were still at school, and the little ones at play in the yard below ; for summer had come, and they need no longer be cooped up in the house. She was glad that it had so happened ; glad that no one but Ann and herself knew of the arrival of those two letters. Yet Ann might be so indiscreet as to inform Nina that the postman had brought one for her. She had several times heard the child inquiring if he had not, and wondering and lamenting that no one in her old home cared to write to her. Mrs. Powell could have told of two or three letters which had been inter-

cepted by herself and Homer; but she did not choose that Nina should know of them, or of this one; and presently she laid down her work for a moment, while she went to the head of the stairs and called to Ann.

"What do you wish, ma'am?" asked the girl, showing herself below, broom in hand.

"Merely to say to you that I desire you not to mention to Miss Nina that a letter came for her. I do not choose that she should hear of it until I tell her myself."

"Very well, ma'am," and Ann retreated to the dining-room, whence she had come, while Mrs. Powell returned to her easy-chair and her sewing.

"An' a pretty fool I was to carry it to *her*," muttered Ann, wielding her broom with an energy born of vexation. "I could hate myself for it! Have n't I heard the pretty dear wearying for a letter time and time agin? an' now to think I've gone and give it to that ould termagent, that'll niver let her get a glint o' it. Ann Quinn, you ought to be bate."

"Oh dear, how awful hot it is!" exclaimed Diadema; "there is n't hardly a breath of air stirring, and the sun's just scorching, and the pavements burn me through my shoes. Don't they you, Nina?"

"Yes, the bricks feel as if they'd been in the fire. This is the worst time of day to be out, for there is n't a bit of shade on either side of the street. I wish we had but one session, like some of the private schools."

"So do I: but one good thing, this is the last week of school, and then there's two months' holiday, and I can stay in the house and keep pretty cool, if I like. And mother says I shall go to Aunt Sallie's for two or three weeks, if I want to; and that'll be grand, for you see they live on a farm."

"And I always lived on a farm till I came here," sighed Nina. "Oh dear, if I could only go home!" and the scalding tears fell from her eyes.

"And you don't care much for vacation, do you?"

"No; this home's a good deal worse than school to me:

I know Aunt Comfort will keep me at work from morning to night."

"Comfort!" cried Diadema, "she ought to be called discomfort, for I'm sure she must be the most uncomfortable person to live with that I ever saw or heard tell of. You poor dear, I wish you could come and live with us. But here's home, and so good-bye till afternoon."

"My sakes, Miss Nina, you look a'most melted!" said Ann, as she let the child in at the gate; "a'n't it awful hot?"

"Yes; I feel just like a wilted flower," replied the little girl, pulling off her hat and using it for a fan, while she dropped into a chair with a weary sigh.

"Well, your school's a'most out, a'n't it?" asked Ann, setting the chairs up to the table.

"Yes, this makes the last week; but I'm not a bit glad, unless I could go home. Oh dear, why does n't somebody write to me! Ann, don't letters ever come for me?"

Ann's rosy face grew more rosy, and for once she was glad to see Mrs. Powell walk into the room, as it saved her the trouble of answering, for she had not made up her mind whether she should tell Nina the whole truth or not.

"What are you sitting there for, Nina?" asked her aunt, sharply. "Dinner is coming on the table, and you are not ready. Go up-stairs instantly, and wash your hands and face and smooth your hair, as I have ordered you to do whenever you come in from school."

"I was so tired and hot I could n't help sitting down to rest a minute," murmured the child, rising to obey.

"Lazy, slovenly creature," muttered Mrs. Powell, looking after her as she left the room.

"I guess may-be she's kind o' weak, ma'am," remarked Ann, simply. "You know she ha'n't had much but bread an' water lately, an' that's not over-strengthenin'."

An angry look, which the girl pretended not to see, was the only reply.

Ann was quite right, as doubtless Mrs. Powell's conscience

told her. Nina was suffering from the want of a sufficiency of nourishing food, as well as from being overworked and too constantly confined to the house; for she was allowed scarcely any out-door exercise, save the daily walks to and from school.

"I wish to have a little private talk with you, Thomas," said Mrs. Powell to her husband, as they rose from the tea-table that afternoon; "we will go up to the sitting-room; the boys can amuse themselves here, and Nina may take the little ones into the yard for half an hour."

"Very well, my dear; I am at your service," Mr. Powell answered, feeling uncomfortably apprehensive of a certain lecture, but trying not to show it.

"Well, my dear, what is it?" he asked, as they seated themselves and she took up her sewing.

"I believe I said I wanted to have a talk with you," was the rather curt rejoinder.

"Certainly, my dear, I know you did, and I am prepared to give the closest attention to whatever you may have to say."

"Here are some letters I wish you to read and answer," she said, taking from her pocket, and handing to him, the two the postman had brought that morning. "You have more time than I:

'Man's work is from sun to sun;  
But a woman's work is never done;'

and it does seem as if I should never get to the end of this everlasting sewing."

"Well, my dear, hire some one to help you."

"Hire some one! You talk as if you were made of money; but you'd soon sing another song if I took you at your word."

"Indeed, my dear, I want you to have all the help you need," he said, soothingly.

"Nonsense, Thomas; don't be a fool if you can help it! You know as well as I do that we're not rich enough for me to live in idleness; but instead of appreciating my unceasing

industry, you talk as if I was exerting myself without any necessity; and as if it would be quite as well for me to fold my hands, and do nothing. Well, when I'm gone, and you get a lazy, shiftless wife, you'll perhaps begin to understand my worth."

"Oh now, my dear," he answered, deprecatingly, "I assure you that you have quite misunderstood me. I know you are the very best of wives, and that you deserve unlimited credit for your untiring industry, and I—I really meant nothing but that I would like to see you relieved of some of your burdens, and would gladly pay for any help you might choose to hire."

"Will you comply with my request, and read those letters at once?"

"Certainly. But," glancing over them, "this one is addressed to Nina. Excuse me for asking, but is she—is she quite willing that I should read it?"

"Thomas Powell, I do declare you're the most aggravating man I ever came across! Of course Nina knows nothing about it,—has never seen it, and never will."

"But, my dear, I—I'm not sure that—that it is quite honorable; indeed, it is a penitentiary crime to open and read other people's letters."

"How ridiculous! a mere child, and under our care, too; really, Mr. Powell, I gave you credit for more sense. But if you are really too honorable, or too cowardly, to read that letter, let it alone, and examine the other. It will be sufficient, as they are from the same person, and on the same subject."

He colored, and looked uncomfortable, but without making any reply, dropped Nina's letter, and took up the other, which he read carefully through.

"Well, my dear, what do you say to Mrs. Croft's proposal?" he asked, as he laid it down. "I suppose she may as well go, since it will occasion no expense to us. She will enjoy the visit to her old home, and it will do her good. I

notice that she looks pale and thin of late ; and then you will be relieved, for those two months, from a portion of your cares."

"There, that 's just like a man!" she remarked, in her severest tone. "Your first thought is of Nina's enjoyment ; your wife is only a secondary consideration ; and you would relieve me of my cares by taking away the one on whom I shall depend to look after and amuse the little ones. You are good at planning for your wife's comfort, Mr. Powell."

"I must say I think you are a little unjust to me now, Comfort," he said, in a hurt tone. "How could I suppose that Nina was a help, rather than a care, when I have so frequently heard you speak of the trouble, annoyance, and expense caused by her coming among us?"

"Yes, she has given me no end of trouble ; and now that there is an opportunity to make her useful, you would send her away," replied his wife, not in the least embarrassed or confused by the glaring inconsistency he pointed out.

She then proceeded to unfold her plans. The boys were to be sent to some cheap place in the country for the holidays ; Ann was to be dismissed, and her work given to Nina ; "the girl was growing careless and saucy, Nina could be made to supply her place very well while out of school, and it would be an easy matter to find another half-grown girl in the fall ; and, in the meantime, there would be the saving of Ann's wages, to say nothing of her board."

"I am afraid the plan — though an excellent one in most respects — will hardly work well," suggested Mr. Powell, diffidently ; "Nina is so much younger than Ann, and does not look very strong."

"Nonsense ! She is perfectly healthy, and a little work will do her no harm ; it will be much better for her than idleness —

'Satan finds some mischief still,  
For idle hands to do.'

There never was a truer saying, and therefore I shall consider

that I am doing the child the greatest kindness in furnishing her with plenty of employment."

"Very well, my dear; no doubt you are in the right, as you generally are," meekly replied her submissive spouse.

And so the matter was settled, and two letters were written and mailed that evening: one to Mrs. Croft, politely declining her invitation to Nina to spend the summer holidays with her; and the other, to the proprietor of a place in the country where, according to advertisement, boys were boarded for the summer at moderate rates.

"My dear," inquired Mr. Powell, in a mildly suggestive tone, as he held his pen for a moment suspended over the paper, on beginning this second letter, "my dear, do you feel quite safe in trusting the boys alone at such a distance from home, and for so long a time, too?"

"Mr. Powell," she replied, with dignity, "you surprise me! What a question for you to ask! I would trust Homer anywhere, and for any length of time; for I am certain he would never do anything his mother would not approve of; and he will keep Sylvester straight."

"Oh, very well, my dear; I merely suggested it, because I know boys will be boys. But, of course, if you have such confidence in Homer, it is all right, and I have no doubt he will prove himself entirely trustworthy. He ought to be a pattern boy with such a mother."

As Mr. Powell came down-stairs with the letters he had just written in his hand, his eye fell upon the slight, childish figure of Nina seated in the doorway of the side entrance, in an attitude of deep dejection, her elbow on her knee, her head resting on her hand; and as he drew nearer he saw that there were tears in her eyes, and that the expression of her face was very sad.

First glancing hastily toward the sitting-room door to make sure that his wife was not observing his movements, he stooped down, and laying his hand caressingly on the soft, glossy curls of raven hair that adorned Nina's pretty head, he asked, kindly, "What is it, my dear? what is the matter?"



“I want my home,” she answered, with a half-suppressed sob; “I want papa and mamma. Oh, if I could just see their graves for a little while — just lie down on mamma’s.”

The tears were falling fast now, and the sobs would not be suppressed.

Mr. Powell was a kind-hearted man, and it hurt him to witness the child’s distress; and all the more, because his conscience told him that he could relieve it, at least in a measure, if he would, and that he ought to do so.

“But, my dear,” he said, soothingly, “you must not think of them as lying in the grave; and it would not really do you any good to look at the sod that covers their poor bodies. They could not speak to you, nor you to them, any more there than here.”

“But I want my home,” she repeated, “my dear, dear home! It is so hot and close here I can hardly breathe; and I’m so tired of brick pavements and brick houses, and white shutters; and I want to sit under the trees on the lovely green grass in the front yard at Oakdale, and hear the birds sing, and look at the flowers; the beds will be full of them, all in bloom. Oh, how mamma and I used to love them!”

“Poor child, I’m truly sorry for you; but try to be cheerful and contented, and one of these days you shall go back there for a visit among your old friends.”

“Shall I?” she said, looking up with a half smile on her tear-stained face. “Ah, why can’t I go now? Next week, when there’ll be no school.”

“I’m afraid it can hardly be that soon,” he answered, avoiding her questioning look: “but some day — next summer, perhaps — you shall go.”

She drooped her head again with a heavy sigh. “And they don’t even write to me,” she said, mournfully. “It is very strange! I think they might send me a letter once in a while. Oh, I hope one will come to-morrow! I’m so hungry for it!”

Mr. Powell could hardly refrain from telling her that one had come, and he actually ventured to go up to the sitting-room again, with the letters in his pocket, and ask his wife to reconsider her plan ; telling her he found Nina was so homesick that it seemed cruel to refuse to allow her to accept Mrs. Croft's invitation.

Mrs. Powell was so astounded at his unheard-of audacity, that she was struck dumb for a moment ; but presently recovering her speech, she indignantly ordered him to go and mail those letters at once, and never let her hear another word on the subject. And he meekly obeyed, quieting his conscience with "anything for peace !"

The next week the boys were sent away, Ann was dismissed, and a harder time began for Nina than she had ever known before. She was called upon to sweep and dust, set tables, clean knives, run errands, answer the door-bell, and act the part of nursery-maid between times.

The first day she ventured an indignant remonstrance. "I am not a servant-girl," she said ; " and I'm sure if mamma was here, she would say I ought not to be made to work like one."

"You are none too good to work," replied Mrs. Powell, in her coldest and most contemptuous tone ; " but you can take your choice — obedience to my orders, or the solitude of your own room ; and as the Bible says those who don't work are not to eat, you will get nothing but bread and water while there."

"You are paid money for my victuals — Kizzy told me so ; and it is n't fair to make me pay for them in work too," cried Nina, with flashing eyes.

"Impertinent girl ! do you dare accuse me of dishonesty ?" said Mrs. Powell, turning pale with anger. " If ever I hear such an insinuation from your lips again, you will not leave your room for a month. You are wonderfully conceited, to imagine that the slight services you are capable of rendering are of any real value to me. I require them of you merely

for your own good. Learning how to do these things is as necessary a part of your education as what is taught you in the school-room, and you ought to be grateful to me for taking the trouble to teach you. But it is evident that ingratitude is a very large ingredient in your base, selfish nature. I am daily more and more convinced that you are an exceedingly depraved child; and nothing but my solemn promise to my dear, departed sister could induce me to allow you to remain under my roof another day."

"Then send me back to Oakdale, Aunt Comfort, do!" cried Nina, eagerly. "I should be *so* glad to go; and I'm sure Dr. Blake could find me a place to board till I'm old enough to keep house in my old home; and I could go to school there, and you would be rid of me. Oh, if you only would!" and the child clasped her hands beseechingly, while her beautiful eyes sparkled at the thought, and the rich color came and went in her cheeks.

"And break my promise to the dead!" said Mrs. Powell, coldly. "No, I am not capable of that, and therefore must keep you here till you are of age, at whatever sacrifice of interest or inclination. Now go at once and sweep the halls and stairs, as I have bidden you; and never let me hear another word of objection to the tasks assigned you."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE WOMAN IN BLACK.

**N**INA had always loved fresh air and sunshine, and the errands which took her into the street were the pleasantest part of her tasks; except when she was required to do them in the heat of the day. She was coming home from the market-store one bright July morning, when a tall woman,

dressed in mourning, her face nearly concealed by a thick crape veil, stopped her, and inquired in honeyed accents, "What is your name, you dear little beauty?"

"My name is Nina Clemmens, ma'am," answered the little girl, simply, her tone expressing surprise.

"You must excuse me for asking," said the stranger; "but you look so like a dear friend of mine, long since dead—" and she heaved a deep sigh, "that I really could not help speaking to you. But her name was not Clemmens; so you cannot be related to her, as I had supposed you might. Are your parents living, my dear?"

"No, ma'am; I am an orphan." And Nina's lip quivered, and her eyes filled.

"Ah, that is sad, very sad at your tender age; but you have kind relatives, with whom you live, I trust?"

The tone was interrogative, and Nina answered, shortly, "I live at my aunt's, Mrs. Powell's."

"Near here?"

"Why do you ask? What difference does it make to you, ma'am?"

"I feel an interest in you, because of your resemblance to my friend."

"Well, it is in the next block. But I must go. Good-morning."

She hurried on, expecting a sharp reprimand for her tardiness, and did not look back till she had knocked at the gate; then, glancing behind her, while waiting for Peggy to give her admittance, she saw that the stranger had followed her to the corner of the little back street into which the gate opened, and was standing there, apparently watching her movements. "How very odd!" thought Nina, as she stepped in and Peggy secured the gate behind her; "I wonder why she cares to know about me, and who she is?" Then, as a sudden recollection came over her, "It seems as if I had seen her face before," she murmured to herself, "only I did n't get a good look at it to-day, because of her veil. I wonder if she is the very same!" and she shuddered involuntarily.

“You seem to be in a brown study, child. There’s no time for that,” said Peggy, crossly, for the little girl was standing quite still in the doorway, with her eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the pavement at her feet. “Here, take this basket and run up to Tripp’s, and ask for a quarter of a peck o’ tomats. I forgot ’em when you were goin’ out to t’other market-store; and we must have some for the soup, for Mr. Powell never likes it without.”

“Very well,” replied Nina, taking the basket, “I’ll go. But where’s the money?”

“You don’t need no money,” said Peggy, in a snappish tone; “you can get ’em charged on the book. Here it is. Mr. Powell pays once’t a month. Now make haste, for I want ’em right away.”

Nina found both Mr. Tripp and Max engaged with other customers, and while awaiting her turn she stood in the doorway, amusing herself with watching what was going on in the street. She started, and uttered a slight exclamation, as she saw the tall woman in black, who had seemed to take so great an interest in her, come out of an ice-cream saloon nearly opposite, draw aside her veil—though still holding it so as partially to conceal her features—and look earnestly across at her for an instant, then walk slowly on up the street.

“Do you know that woman?” asked Mr. Tripp’s voice, at her side.

“Which? that tall one in black?”

“Yes; I thought you were looking at her. She’s a queer acting customer. She’s been in that saloon every day for the last week, and if she’s walked up and down that square, staring across at the houses on this side, once, I should say she’s done it a dozen times. I’d like to know what she’s after.”

“No, Mr. Tripp; I don’t know her. I can’t say that I ever saw her till this morning, when she stopped me in the street and asked my name and where I lived, and two or three other questions. I may have seen her before, but I’m not sure.”

“Did she?” he exclaimed, in surprise. “Well, I’d keep out of her way, if I were you. I don’t believe she’s after any good. But what is it you want, my child?”

Nina told her errand, was waited on, and ran home again as quickly as she could.

All the rest of the morning her thoughts were full of the strange woman; but she said nothing about her to any one in the house; for there was not one of the family to whom she cared to give her confidence. But she had another adventure that day, which for the time almost drove the first out of her mind.

Early in the afternoon her aunt sent her away down into Second Street below Chestnut, to match some ribbon she had bought there. It was a very long walk for the little girl, especially in such weather, for it was a warm day, even for July; and as she set out on her return, she felt almost overcome with the heat and fatigue. She walked slowly and wearily up Chestnut to Sixth, not noticing that a shower was coming on; but suddenly the rain began to fall very fast, and she was forced to take shelter under an awning; for she had no umbrella, nothing but a sun-shade, which would have been scarcely any protection from so heavy a shower.

“Miss, let me return you your fan. You dropped it a little farther down the street, and I picked it up,” said a pleasant, boyish voice behind her; and turning, she found a handsome lad, apparently some two or three years older than herself, standing beside her, smilingly holding out the fan, which she had not missed till that moment.

“Oh, thank you,” she said, taking it from him with one of her sweetest smiles; “I am so much obliged, for I should have been well scolded for losing it.”

“Oh, that would have been too bad, for I am sure the fault was not intentional,” he said, in tones of winning sweetness. Then he remarked, with some hesitation, that she had no umbrella,—that his was large enough for two; that they seemed

to be going in the same direction, and asked if he might have the pleasure of seeing her home.

“Thank you,” Nina answered, blushing; “you are very kind; but perhaps I had better wait here till the shower is over.”

“I think it looks as if it might last for the rest of the day,” he said, glancing up at the sky, “and may you not run some risk of a scolding for leaving your umbrella at home, if you get wet, or are belated?” he asked, with an arch smile.

“It’s not at all unlikely,” replied Nina, returning the smile, and accepting his offered arm.

“That’s right,” he said; “I cannot possibly do you any harm by walking a few squares with you in broad daylight, and who knows but the shelter of my umbrella may save you from catching your death of cold.”

They walked on, chatting gayly, as if they had been brother and sister, and were mutually sorry to part when Mr. Powell’s door was reached; proud little Nina preferring the scolding she was sure to get for entering by the front door, to taking her companion, evidently a gentleman’s son, round to the back gate.

He was a very handsome boy, with large, dark, hazel eyes, a broad, white forehead, an abundance of rich brown curly hair, and a mouth that expressed both firmness and sweetness of disposition.

Nina never forgot that face, and often sighed to herself, “Ah, if he was only my brother, how happy I should be. He’s not in the least like Homer, or indeed like any other boy I ever saw.”

How glad she was that the outer door was unfastened, so that she was able to step into the vestibule, and let him go before her aunt or Peggy could answer the bell. The door was opened by the latter, who lifted her hands in astonishment at Nina’s audacity.

“Well, well, I am surprised!” she exclaimed; “you’re not allowed to come in this ’ere way in dry weather, and here

you come tramping in right out of the mud. What d' you s'pose you 'll catch?"

"I don't know, nor very much care, either," muttered Nina, as she wiped her feet carefully on the mat, and walked up to the sitting-room.

Her aunt looked up in astonishment quite equal to Peggy's.

"Is it possible that was you who rang the front-door bell just now?" she demanded; "did you dare to come in that way, out of all this rain and mud?"

"Yes, ma'am, I did," replied Nina, with provoking coolness, as she laid down the ribbon and the change, and began taking off her hat and gloves.

It was certainly a daring act, for Mrs. Powell's front steps were her special glory and pride, — kept spotlessly clean, and white almost as the driven snow; scrubbed every morning before the neighbors were up, and in dusty weather wiped off several times during the day. And not even Mr. Powell was allowed to pass over them till after dark: every member of the family must go in and out at the side gate; and the postman, the grocer, the baker, all who dealt with them, were instructed to come to that entrance.

Mrs. Powell seemed actually aghast at Nina's hardihood; but recovering herself in a moment, "Very well, miss," she said, in her most freezing tone, "you 'll have nothing but bread for your supper to-night; nothing but bread for breakfast to-morrow. You 'll not break my rules without suffering for it. Now go up-stairs and put away your things, and then come down and set the table for supper."

"What a kind, affectionate aunt you are!" muttered Nina, as she slowly obeyed. "I've walked on your errands till I'm almost tired to death; and you make me keep on working like a slave, and give me nothing but dry bread to eat."

Poor old Peggy always wore a weary, hopeless look, and seldom, if ever, spoke in a cheerful tone of voice. She made frequent complaints of feeling weak and ill; all perfectly useless so far as Mrs. Powell was concerned, for she heard them



with utter indifference: either passing them over in silence, or answering as if convinced that the ailments which called them forth were wholly imaginary. For like many others who are themselves blessed with strong constitutions and uninterrupted health, Mrs. Powell knew not how to sympathize with the infirmities of age or disease. During the last few days, Peggy's complaints had been louder and more frequent than usual, and Nina had thought her looking really ill; but Mrs. Powell chose to believe that it was only a ruse to get rid of the extra work she was called upon to do as the only servant, and to induce her to procure another girl to fill Ann's place.

But Peggy was really very far from well, and when Nina went down to set the table, she found the poor old creature lying half unconscious upon the kitchen floor.

Nina did not scream out at the sight, as many a child of her age would have done, but ran for cold water, sprinkled some in Peggy's face, then raised her head and held a tumbler of it to her lips.

She swallowed a mouthful, heaved a deep, long-drawn sigh, and said, in a half whisper: "I thought I was a'most gone—I'm clear beat out, and can't work another stroke, if 't was to save my life."

"No, I'm sure you can't," said Nina, pityingly; "you ought to go right to bed, and have the doctor. Could you get up-stairs, leaning on me?"

Peggy shook her head hopelessly. "No," she said; "you're a good little thing to offer, but my head's so dizzy, and I feel so weak, I don't b'lieve I could get as far as the sitting-room. I'll have to wait till Thomas—Mr. Powell, I mean—comes in."

"Then let me help you into the dining-room, where there's a carpet, and I'll run up and get a pillow to put under your head."

"Humph, child!" do you s'pose she'd let one of her pillows be laid on the floor? No; not if 't was to save me

from dyin' ; hardly if 't was to save her husband. But you may help me in there, and then, if you'll just roll up that old skirt o' mine I was ironing, and put it under my head, I'll be obleeged to ye."

She rose slowly and with difficulty, as she spoke, and, leaning heavily upon Nina, staggered into the next room.

"I could n't go another step if you'd give me a gold mine," she said, dropping down upon the carpet with a deep groan. "Oh, I tell you it's mighty hard to be as old and poor as I be! I have n't one bit of comfort left in this world."

"I'm very sorry for you, Peggy," said Nina gently, while the tears sprang to her eyes; "but I hope you'll be better soon."

"I don't know as I want to, child," was the reply, in a tone of deep sadness; "I have n't much left to live for, and would n't care how soon death came, if I was only sure of a better time in the next world."

Nina did not know what to say to comfort her, but went for the skirt, which she rolled up and laid under the poor old creature's head.

"You're a dear child, a real kind little creature," said Peggy, catching hold of the small white hand, and pressing it to her lips. "I thought no one cared for the old woman now; nobody but my poor Maggie, that can't get a chance to come nigh me."

"Nina, Nina, have you got the table set?" called Mrs. Powell's sharp voice from above.

"No, ma'am."

"Then come here this instant, and tell me what you've been about."

"I've been helping Peggy, Aunt Comfort: she's very ill," said Nina, as she appeared at the sitting-room door.

"Very ill, is she? I don't believe it; it's all put on to get rid of work. But she'll find I'm not to be taken in in that way. She must do her work, or leave, and let me get some one else in her place."

Nina dared not trust herself to speak for a moment, she felt so indignant; and she was glad that Essie came running to her with the request that she would tie her shoe, for as she stooped to do so, her face was hidden from her aunt.

“Were you helping about the supper?” asked Mrs. Powell.

“No, ma’am; I found Peggy lying on the floor in a kind of faint, and she does n’t get over it. She can’t hold her head up at all; and I’m sure if you would go down and look at her, Aunt Comfort, you could n’t help seeing that she is really sick.”

Mrs. Powell rose, folded her work, and went down. She was a little startled at the sight of the death-like face of her old servant, who lay there with her eyes closed, and not a trace of color on cheek or lip. But, determined not to believe there was anything serious amiss, — not to be cheated into a waste of compassion (which was, perhaps, not unwise, considering that her stock in trade was so small), she remarked, in her icy tones, as the old woman opened her eyes, and looked up at her, “I hope you are not intending to be sick, Peggy? you could hardly have chosen a more inconvenient time.”

“I did n’t choose,” muttered Peggy, adding some incoherent words, which showed that her mind was wandering.

The children had followed Mrs. Powell.

“She does n’t know what she’s talking about!” exclaimed Nina, in alarm. “Aunt Comfort, sha’ n’t I run for the doctor?”

“No; go to work at once and set the table as I bade you. Go for a doctor, indeed! If I sent for one every time Peggy chooses to think herself ill, it would take more than all she earns to pay his bills.”

“I should think anybody could see that she’s real sick now,” said Nina, indignantly; while little Essie exclaimed, “Oh, mamma, poor old Peggy *is* sick! See how white her face is. Won’t you give Peggy some med’cine, to make her well?”

"Peggy," said Mrs. Powell, "if you are really unable to work, you had better go to bed. There is no use in your lying there; you are in the way, and you will be far more comfortable in bed."

Peggy had closed her eyes again, and did not seem to hear; but Nina said, "She can't get up-stairs without some big, strong person to help her, Aunt Comfort; when she tries to walk she falls right down."

Just then there was a knock at the gate, and Nina, running to open it, was very glad to find her uncle there. She began eagerly to tell him about Peggy, but Mrs. Powell was already at the door, wearing a martyr-like countenance, and complaining that "Peggy had given out entirely, and she found herself compelled to do her own work."

"I'm sorry, my dear," he said, soothingly; "but if Peggy seems likely to be ill any time, we must try to get another girl. Is she very sick?"

"How should I know? She makes so much fuss about every little trifle, that there's no knowing when she is really ill."

"Come and look at her, uncle; she's in here," said Nina, leading the way.

He perceived at a glance that his poor old aunt was really alarmingly ill, and his look from her to his wife seemed to say, "How can you doubt now that her complaints are well founded?"

"Well, you are satisfied that she's really ill now?" she said, interrogatively, in her cold, metallic tones; adding, "Then do take her up to her bed; this room is no place for sick folks."

"Not all the way to the garret, Comfort, surely," he answered, in a tone of unwonted decision.

"And why not?" she asked, sharply.

"Being so near the roof, it is much too hot and close for a sick person. Besides, it will be absolutely necessary that she should have some attention, and it would make the nursing very hard to have her up so high."

“Very well, then: may I ask what room you would select for her ladyship?”

“The spare room I should think the most suitable, as it is the lowest down,” he answered, with some hesitation.

“The spare room, indeed!” exclaimed his wife, indignantly; “do you actually expect me to give up the best room in the house to a servant-woman? I’ll do no such thing!”

“You forget, Comfort, that she was my mother’s sister,” Nina heard him say, in a low, hurt tone. She had long felt sure there was some mystery connected with Peggy; and so this was it.

“That makes no difference, Thomas; she has lost caste, and is nothing but a servant now,” said his wife, coldly. “You may take her to the boys’ room, if you choose—but that’s the best I can do for her.”

He lost no time in availing himself of the permission so ungraciously accorded, and, gently lifting the half-insensible woman in his arms, he carried her up to the room back of Nina’s, and laid her on the bed, tried to arrange the pillows comfortably, opened the window to give her air, and, coming back to the bedside, asked, almost tenderly, “What more can I do for you now, Aunt Peggy?”

A moan and a few incoherent words were the only answer; and perceiving that she was hardly conscious, he hastened down-stairs, picked up his hat, and merely saying, “I’m going for a doctor, I’m afraid she’s very sick,” hurried out of the house without giving his wife time to object.

In a few moments he returned, bringing the family physician with him, and they went up-stairs together.

“Well, what does Dr. Allen say? Is she going to have a spell of sickness?” asked Mrs. Powell, as her husband came in to his supper.

“He says she’s a very sick woman,” he answered, in a tone of sadness; for conscience was telling him that he had not been as kind to his poor old relation as he ought.

“It’s very unfortunate, particularly just now,” muttered Mrs. Powell, pouring out the tea, with an ill-used air; “but that’s always the way with servants: they will go off, or get sick, just when they know they’re needed most.”

“Well, my dear, sickness comes without being invited,” remarked her husband. “But you must have help. Shall I put an advertisement into the papers? or call at the intelligence offices? or both?”

“Neither,” she said, tartly. “I’m not going to have a stranger coming in, to turn everything upside down, and steal all she can lay her hands on. I can manage pretty well for a few days with Nina’s help, and Peggy may be up again much sooner than the doctor thinks. Doctors are always making mistakes, and I don’t see the use of calling them in for every little trifle,” she added, so pointedly that her husband colored, and seemed to feel called upon to justify himself.

“Peggy is certainly very sick indeed, Comfort,” he said, “and I felt that I ought to have medical advice for her at once; for that if I did n’t, and she should die, I could never forgive myself.”

“I have made no objection, and found no fault,” she answered, dryly; “but it’s an old saying that ‘a guilty conscience needs no accuser.’”

The next few days were very hard ones to Nina, her aunt putting as much work upon her as possible — making her assist with the cooking, and do all the dish-washing, and all the running up and down stairs to wait upon Peggy, whose illness increased to such an extent, that the doctor soon told Mr. Powell he feared she would not recover, and that if she had any relatives, they ought to be at once informed of her danger.

That part of the physician’s communication which referred to Peggy’s danger, Mr. Powell repeated to his wife; but the rest he kept to himself — at least as far as she was concerned, though perhaps not as regarded others; for one evening there came a timid rap on the gate, and Nina, who had just come

down from a visit to Peggy, and was leaning out of the sitting-room window, trying to catch a breath of fresh air, saw a slight, girlish figure standing before it.

Mrs. Powell was the only person in the lower part of the house at that moment, and she stepped out of the kitchen door and opened the gate.

“Who are you, and what do you want?” she asked, in her usual kind and pleasant tone.

“I—I heard that my mother was ill,—dying, perhaps,” said a trembling, tearful voice, “and—and I thought may-be you would be so kind as to let me come and take care of her; or, if that was too much to ask, you’d permit me just to see her for a few moments.”

“So it is you,—*you!*” exclaimed Mrs. Powell, recoiling, and putting her hands up before her face, as if to ward off something exceedingly offensive. “How dare you come here again? You who belong to the very offscouring and scum of society! You who have been already told that I will never permit my house to be again polluted by your vile presence! Begone instantly, or I will call the police!”

“Mrs. Powell,” said the girl, with deep humility, “I know that I’m not a fit companion for you, or any other woman who has not done anything to injure her good name; but I have repented, and the Lord has forgiven me, and I’m trying my best to serve him now. Yet I don’t expect forgiveness from you, or the world; but could you not let me see my mother for one half-hour? my poor, dying mother?”

“No; never shall you cross my threshold, Margaret Slater! I have said it, and I will stand to it,” was the cold, heartless reply. “Now will you step back and let me shut the gate, or shall I call the police?”

“Mrs. Powell,” sobbed the girl, “have you no feeling at all, that you would deny me the comfort of a half-hour with the mother that bore me—the only near relation I have left to love me? If you are so hard to me, how can you hope for mercy yourself at His hands who has said, ‘If ye forgive

not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.' ”

“Insolent wretch! how dare you institute a comparison between the few failings of my virtuous and Christian life and the dreadful wickedness of which you have been guilty?” cried Mrs. Powell, with great indignation. “Step back instantly, and let me shut the gate.”

The girl obeyed, and Nina could hear her bitter sobbing as she moved slowly down the alley in the direction of the larger street on which the house fronted. The child's heart swelled with anger toward her aunt, and with pity for the heart-broken girl; and with a sudden impulse she started up, stole softly down the stairs, through the hall, and out at the front door. She was just in time to hail Margaret as she passed.

“Stop! stop a minute! I want to speak to you,” she called, in an undertone.

“Oh,” cried the poor girl, eagerly; “has she relented at last? and will she let me see my poor mother?”

“No,” said Nina, pityingly; “but I want to tell you how very sorry I feel for you, and that I'll carry a message to your mother, if you will trust me. She's very sick, but sometimes she knows what we say to her; and I'll watch for one of those times, and tell her what you say.”

“Oh, thank you! How very, very kind you are! Tell her I long to come and nurse her—oh, it's hard to be kept from her when her life may depend on having good nursing! for that's often worth more than all the doctors can do; and oh, it's dreadful to know that it's all because of my sin that my poor mother must suffer,” she exclaimed, wringing her hands in anguish.

For a minute, sobs choked her utterance; but, controlling herself with an effort, she went on: “But there's one thing, miss, that I feel even more anxious about than the saving of her life. My poor mother is not a Christian, and she thinks religion is all hypocrisy; because—because—excuse me



for saying it—because those she's been thrown with, that profess to be Christians, haven't lived up to it, but have been hard and cruel, instead of kind and pitiful and forgiving, like the dear Lord Jesus. And I'd be glad if you'd tell her, from me, that she's not to judge of religion by them; for I've found those that are full of love and pity, and don't feel themselves too good to help the fallen to rise,—no, not even to speak kind, cheering, encouraging words to such as me."

"I'll tell her, but why should anybody think herself too good to speak to you?"

"Oh, I can't tell you; you're too young and innocent; and I'm afraid I oughtn't to be talking to you now. I'm not fit to speak to the like of you," she answered, hurriedly, moving away a little as she spoke. "But I must say just one word more. Oh, could n't you, could n't you tell my mother about Jesus?" she cried, clasping her hands together, and speaking in tones tremulous with emotion: "how He died to save sinners, even the very worst, and that He'll save her if she'll only let go of everything else, and go to him just as she is, without waiting to make herself any better. She must n't wait for that, for she can never do the work herself; but if she'll go right to him, He'll do it all for her."

"I don't know much about him, myself," said Nina; "but I'll try to remember what you've been telling me, and tell it to her."

"Thank you! thank you! But oh, I wish you knew and loved him, too. Good-bye, little dear, and God bless you for your kindness?"

So saying, she turned, and almost ran down the street, while Nina softly opened the door just far enough to slip in, shut it noiselessly behind her, and, hearing her aunt still moving about in the kitchen, crept cautiously up to the sitting-room again.

The poor child was very weary; so much work had been required of her, and she had been up and down stairs so many times that day—and, indeed, every day since Peggy had been

taken with this sickness, for the poor old woman was much too ill to be left alone for any length of time; and, except when Mr. Powell was in the house, there was no one but Nina to wait upon her.

Mr. Powell had carried a cot-bed into the sick-room, and there Nina now lay at night, that she might be at hand if Peggy needed any attention. This had been done at the little girl's own suggestion, for her kind heart refused to leave even a servant to suffer, when it was in her power to give relief; but over-exertion during the day, and disturbed rest at night, were beginning to tell sensibly upon her; and to-night she felt scarcely adequate to the exertion of climbing the stairs to the third story. So she lingered till her aunt came up from the kitchen.

“What are you doing here, Nina?” she asked, sharply. “I thought I had sent you up to go to bed half an hour ago.”

“Yes, Aunt Comfort; but I'm so tired, and it's so hot in the third story. It's just a little bit cooler here.”

“Go up to your bed this minute,” commanded Mrs. Powell; “you are none too ready to rise betimes in the morning, and it's a wicked waste of time to be sitting here doing nothing when you need to be sleeping. Go!”

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### WATCHED.

**N**INA! NINA!”

The child started up in bed, asking, “What is it, Peggy? do you want a drink again?”

“No; but I want to know what's goin' on in the house. I'm sure I heard doors open and shut; and it's the dead o' night, a'n't it?”

“Yes,” said Nina, listening; “I think I hear some one going down-stairs; and, hark! there’s the front door. What a slam! Would robbers do that way?”

“No, indeed, child,” said Peggy, with a low laugh that astonished Nina, so foreign to the old woman’s character seemed anything approaching to mirth. “No, indeed,” she repeated, with another slight chuckle, “them as comes to rob steals about the house as quiet as a cat. That must ha’ been Thomas—Mr. Powell I mean—a goin’ after the doctor, or the nurse, or both on ’em. She’s took, and I’m glad on ’t; for who knows but he’ll let my Margie come to me now, when he can do it unbeknownst to her? He’s not half so hard as she is, and he’d be good enough to me if she’d only let him.”

“Why, Peggy, what do you mean?” asked the little girl, in a tone of surprise; “is Aunt Comfort sick, do you think? I did n’t know she ever was.”

But Peggy only answered with a moan, and a muttered request for water.

Nina got out of bed and gave it to her; then crept back again, and lay listening for her uncle’s return; but fell asleep without having heard it.

When she woke again, the sun was shining brightly, and she sprang up and dressed in haste, thinking she would get a severe scolding, if not something worse, for so over-sleeping herself.

Peggy was tossing restlessly from side to side on her pillow, looking wretchedly ill.

“I had n’t the heart to wake you,” she said; “but I’ve been a longin’ to have them shutters pulled to, to keep out the sun, it’s so awful hot.”

“Yes, I’ll shut them,” said Nina, doing so as she spoke. “Now what shall I bring you for your breakfast, Peggy? I must hurry down to the kitchen. How Aunt Comfort will scold me for sleeping so long.”

“You’ll not find *her* in the kitchen. I hope she’s feelin’

as bad now as I be," groaned Peggy. —"Just fetch me up a cup o' tea, dear; I could n't take a mouthful o' nothin' else."

Except a murmur of little voices coming from Mrs. Powell's room, the house seemed perfectly quiet as Nina ran lightly down the stairs; but, on entering the kitchen, she was greatly surprised to find a strange woman bending over the range, preparing toast and tea, as if she felt quite at home.

"Good-morning," she said, in a cheerful tone, turning her head and showing a good-natured, sensible face, as Nina came toward her. "You did n't expect to find me here, did you?"

"No, certainly not," said the child, with a slight laugh; "how should I, when I did n't know there was such a person in all the world?"

"Of course you could n't; but I'm not the only stranger in the house — there's a little boy up-stairs."

"A little boy?" cried Nina, elevating her eyebrows. "What brought him here? and whose little boy is he?"

"Your aunt's. Mrs. Powell's your aunt, is n't she? And a fine, plump little fellow he is, too; and he has a big voice of his own. There! don't you hear him now?"

"What! is it a baby?"

"Yes. Are you glad or sorry?"

"Glad, I believe — if I don't have to carry him about too much. I like little babies."

The woman presently took her toast and tea up-stairs, and Mr. Powell came down with Essie and Belle.

"Your aunt's taken sick, Nina, and you and I'll have to turn cooks, and get the breakfast, I suppose," he said laughingly. "Just have an eye to these children, while I run to the market-store and get what's needed. And don't be worried, my dear; I'll go for a girl after breakfast," he added, cheerily, as he put on his hat and went out, with a large basket on his arm.

He came back shortly, bringing with him abundant material for such a bountiful meal as Nina had never before seen

in that house ; and while helping her to prepare it, was so merry and jovial, that she could not help thinking he was as glad as herself to escape for a time from his wife's surveillance.

"Nina, can you keep a secret?" he asked, in an undertone, as they left the table.

"Try me, uncle," she answered, brightly. "Mamma used to say I could."

"Well, then, I am going for Peggy's daughter. I think she will come, for her mother's sake, and nurse her, and help you with the work. But I—I would n't have your aunt know it for the world ; because she has a strong prejudice against the poor girl, and it would make her quite ill to know that she was in the house."

"But how can we prevent it? won't Essie tell her?"

"Essie does not know Maggie ; and she must come here under another name, and take care never to let Mrs. Powell see her face or hear her voice. I'll have to let Mrs. Mullen, the nurse, into the secret ; but I can trust her to keep it."

He went away, and returned in less than an hour, bringing with him a young woman, neatly but very plainly dressed. She looked to be about twenty, and her sweet, fair face, touchingly sad and humble in its expression, won Nina's heart at the first glance. It was Peggy's daughter, and when she spoke, Nina recognized the voice—low, sweet, and mournful in its tones.

"I am so glad to get a sight of your face, for I can never forget your kindness," were the first words, accompanied by an earnest, grateful, admiring gaze at the bright, beautiful, smiling countenance of the little girl, as she admitted them, and then turned to look at the new comer, while Mr. Powell fastened the gate.

"It was nothing," said Nina, taking her hand and pressing it cordially between her own. "And I'm so glad you've come ; for your sake and your mother's, too. And I'm glad to see how you look, for it was too dark that night to get even a glimpse of your face."

“I’m glad you’re pleased with each other,” said Mr. Powell. “Nina, we are to call this young woman Molly. She will take the heavy end of the work till we can find somebody else. I must run up to your aunt’s room now, for a moment, and then hurry off to business.”

He ran up on tiptoe, and finding his wife asleep, beckoned the nurse into the next room, explained matters to her, and received her promise that the new girl should, on no account, be called into Mrs. Powell’s presence.

Great was the joy of poor old Peggy when, on waking from a doze, she found her daughter standing by her side. The sight seemed to restore entirely her scattered senses. To both, the joy was too great for words; and, clasped in each other’s arms, they mingled their glad tears together. Margaret had raised her mother up, and laid the gray head upon her bosom, while she pressed loving kisses upon the pale, wrinkled brow.

“Mother, dear mother!” she murmured at length. “Thank God that He has answered my prayers, and opened a way for me to come and be your nurse. You shall get well now, if love and care can make you so.”

“I know it, my darling,” gasped Peggy; “and the very sight o’ you does me good like a med’cine. But now lay me down, for I’m mighty weak.”

Margaret’s presence seemed to do every one good—there was something very soothing in her quiet, gentle manner; and even fretful little Belle yielded to its influence, ceased crying, and was so good, that her mother asked if the child had been sent away from the house.

Margaret was one of those who have the happy faculty of accomplishing a great deal without any hurry or confusion, noise or bustle; everything went like clock-work under her management, as quietly and as steadily. Her mother’s comfort was thoroughly cared for, the house kept in good order, the meals were well cooked, and ready punctually to the minute; and yet Nina was no longer over-worked. She

did what she chose, and that was a good deal for a girl of her age; but nothing was required of her, and what she did was done willingly, and cheerfully, too, now that there were no black looks to be encountered, and no scolding and fault-finding to be borne.

Mr. Powell never scolded; he was only too glad to be rid of the sound of bitter words of upbraiding and reproof—for he was a dear lover of peace and quietness. And as for Margaret, she would sooner have expected a reproof from Nina, than have thought of administering one to her. Her manner toward the little girl, as well as toward every one else, seemed to say that she felt herself entirely unworthy to be their companion. She seldom spoke, except when it was necessary, or when an answer to some question or remark seemed to be expected of her.

Nina watched her closely, often wondering within herself what the poor girl could have done that her aunt thought so wicked; and as she watched, and beheld, day by day, the lowly, consistent Christian walk, the quiet, unobtrusive effort to be and do what was pleasing in the sight of God, the conviction grew strong within her, that, in spite of Mrs. Powell's self-righteous boasting, she was not, in reality, as good as the poor, despised, but humble and penitent Margaret, whom she so utterly contemned.

"It's like the Pharisee and the Publican. Aunt Comfort is the Pharisee, and Molly the Publican," was the child's silent comment.

The only drawback to Nina's enjoyment of this interval of peace and quietness was, that the care of the little ones, joined to the heat of the weather, which prevented her from taking them out, kept her too closely confined within doors. But at length, a bright, cool day succeeding a rain-storm, enabled her to do so. They set off for a walk in high glee, Nina saying to herself that she would call for Diadema, and ask her to go with them.

The two had seen very little of each other since the be-

ginning of the holidays, and had not met at all for nearly a fortnight, which seemed a very long time to Nina.

“Oh,” cried Essie, as they turned the corner, “there’s an old woman with a basket, sitting on our steps. See, Nina! Will mamma like it? Won’t the old woman make the steps dirty?”

“I guess not; she looks clean.”

“But what does she sit there for?”

“I don’t know, dear; but I suppose she’s tired, and wants to rest herself.”

“Yes,” said the woman, overhearing them; “an’ I’ve got the nice cakes an’ candies for the little ladies. See, dears; an’ ye’ll buy a few cints’ worth, just for to help the ould woman a bit; won’t ye, now?”

“If I had a penny, I would,” said Essie, looking longingly at the candy.

“I would like to help you,” said Nina, standing still for a moment; “but I have no money.”

“Thank ye for the will, thin, dear; and oh, but ye’re a purty creetur’! An’ is thim ye’re sisters, now? thim two little darlins’?”

“No; we’re Essie and Belle Powell, and she’s my cousin, Nina Clemmens,” said Essie, answering the question which had been addressed to Nina.

“Nina! och but it’s an odd name!” said the woman, gazing, with mingled curiosity and admiration, into the bright face of the little girl; “and is it the one ye got when ye was christened, sure? or only what folks call ye for short?”

“It is my full name,” replied the little girl, shortly, for she thought the woman’s curiosity slightly impertinent. “Come, children; we must n’t stop here.” And she walked on, leading Belle, while Essie skipped along before her.

“That’ll be her, an’ no mistake,” muttered the woman, nodding her head wisely, as she looked after them; “that’ll be her, and now I’ll kape watch on her. Wull, she’s a purty creetur’, she is, as iver I set eyes on.”



They were passing Mr. Tripp's store, and Nina looked in, expecting to see him behind the counter, and intending to ask if Diadema was at home. But, to her surprise, he was not to be seen, and Mrs. Tripp was waiting upon the only customer there — a poorly-dressed woman, for whom she was weighing out a pound of tea.

“Why, good-morning, Mrs. Tripp; I did n't expect to see you here!” said Nina, stepping in. “Is Di at home?”

“La sakes, child! is it you?” cried Mrs. Tripp, with a pleased smile. “Why, I have n't seen you for an age! Where have you been keepin' yourself? No, Di's not at home; she's gone down to Jersey, to her aunt's. She's been gone nigh on to a week, and won't be comin' back for two or three more, I reckon. But a' n't you agoin' in? Orie's to home.”

“No, thank you, ma'am; I'm taking the children a walk, and I wanted to get Di to go along.”

“She'd go in a minute if she was here,” said Mrs. Tripp, as the customer gathered up her change and departed; “but she's at her aunt's, as I said afore. Max, he took her down, and he come back this mornin', and just see here the beautiful brokay he fetched me, right from my sister's garding. I kept it here on the counter, where I can see it while I tend store; for you see Mr. Tripp has took sick, and the boys is off on some errands their father wanted done; and Orie, she's a sight too proud and stuck up to be willin' to stand behind the counter; and *he* don't care for flowers; and what's the use o' shuttin' em up in the dark parlor?”

“It would be a pity, I'm sure,” said Nina. “What beauties they are! Those verbenas are lovely, and remind me so of our garden at home, in dear old Oakdale,” she added, with a sigh.

“Yes, dear, and you shall have a share of them,” said the ever generous, warm-hearted Mrs. Tripp, making haste to separate several of the fragrant beauties from the bouquet, and

place them in the child's hand. "There! Don't say I'm robbing myself, for there's a plenty for us both."

"Oh, thank you: I do so love flowers!" cried Nina, her eyes sparkling, and her cheeks glowing with delight, as she received the gift, and shared it with her little cousin; for Belle was begging for "a pitty fower," and Essie looking at them with longing eyes.

"I hope Mr. Tripp is not very sick?" Nina remarked, in a tone of anxious inquiry; for she liked him almost as well as she did his wife. "What is the matter?"

"Well, he's pretty bad; but not dangerous, I hope," said the wife. "He was took in the night, right bad, and I wanted to send Colin for the doctor; but he said 't was n't worth while—a little laudanum would bring him round, he thought: so I give him a dose; but it did n't seem to do no good, and I sent round for the doctor the first thing after daylight; and he said it was cholera—cholera infantum; I believe that was it—cholera somethin', any how. Oh, here comes Orie; she'll know. Orie, was it cholera infantum the doctor called your pap's sickness?"

"Why no, mother; how you talk! He said cholera morbus," Oriana answered, in a rather petulant tone. "How you do get things mixed up. Father wants you now, right away; and I've to stay and 'tend store till the boys come back. I declare it's too mean! I wish they'd hurry."

"They'll be along presently, and 't a'n't likely anybody'll be in that knows you," replied her mother soothingly, as she hurried away.

Nina lingered only a moment longer, to leave a message for Diadema, then went out, and continued her walk with the little ones.

Mrs. Mullen answered her knock at the gate on their return.

"It was well I happened to be down here, or you might have knocked some time before you got in," she said. "Where's that Molly, now?"

“Up-stairs, with Peggy, I suppose.”

“Well, it’s time she was down, getting dinner. You’d better call her.”

“I will. Essie, dear, take care of Belle till I come down again.”

Nina trod lightly as she neared Peggy’s door, for she thought the poor old woman, who was still confined to bed,—though she had been growing better ever since her daughter’s coming, — might have fallen asleep, and she did not want to disturb her.

The door was open, to admit the air, and entering on tip-toe, the little girl found both Peggy and Margaret sleeping quietly — the old woman on her bed, and her daughter leaning back in an arm-chair by the bedside. She had been reading to her mother, and afterwards to herself, and an open Bible lay in her lap. Her face looked calm and peaceful; and yet there was a mournful expression, and a tear trembled on her eyelash; and, glancing at the book, Nina saw that one had fallen upon its open page. She leaned over it and read, “And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more.”

“She’s been reading those words,” said the child to herself, “and she’s glad, and sorry, too; I see it in her face: sorry she’s been wicked, and glad that Jesus has forgiven her.”

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### UNSATISFIED CURIOSITY.

MRS. POWELL was fast recovering; she would soon be able to leave her room, and Margaret must go, and her place be filled by another; for Peggy, though long since out of danger, and now able to sit up most of the day, and even

to crawl down-stairs, was not yet by any means equal to taking up the old burdens of care and labor. Mrs. Powell was indignant that she had dared to be ill so long, causing so much trouble and expense. But it could not be helped: Mr. Powell was not willing to send her to the hospital, and she did not insist, because it might make a talk, if ever the neighbors found out the relationship; and perhaps it was as well that she did not, for Peggy would probably be fit for work again before a great while, and, not requiring very high wages, she suited them better than a stranger would. And, besides, small as her remuneration had always been, they might make it still less until the doctor's and druggist's bills were paid.

A new girl was found, and duly installed; Margaret remained and superintended her operations for a day or two, then, bidding a tearful farewell to her mother and the children, went away, and Nina saw her no more.

The next day the monthly nurse was dismissed, and Mrs. Powell came down-stairs, and resumed her sway. The boys were recalled, and the family fell back into their old routine—Jane, the new girl, gradually giving up the duties of cook to assume those of chambermaid and child's-nurse, as Peggy grew strong enough to begin work again.

"Well, I never saw the like? No, I never did!" cried Jane, coming into the kitchen, where Peggy was at work. And she dropped into a chair, and waited for the old woman to question her.

But Peggy was not curious; and, besides, knew that the quickest way to learn any piece of news Jane might have to tell, was to pretend perfect indifference in regard to it; so, merely uttering a slight inarticulate sound, she went on quietly with her dish-washing, as though she had not heard her companion's exclamation.

Jane waited a moment, then remarked, in a piqued tone: "You don't never seem to take no interest in nothin', Peggy. I never saw the like of you; no, I never did. But I s'pose I may as well tell you first as last."

Peggy smiled a grim smile of satisfaction at the success of her mode of treatment of her gossip-loving fellow-servant; and Jane went on.

“The mistress has just done dressin’ the baby for his christenin’, which you know is to be to-day; and oh, the beautifullest clo’es you ever did see! Why, they must have cost a power of money!” she cried, lifting her hands and eyes; “I should n’t have thought she’d ever have afforded the like of it, seeing he is n’t the first by ever so many, and she’s so equonomical and savin’ in her ways.”

Peggy was really interested now. “Why, what are they like?” she asked, with a look of surprise.

“Oh, the finest stuff you ever see, and all tiny tucks and splendid ’broidery and lace; and the sleeves of the little dress is looped up with the prettiest coral and gold armlets; and the little blanket that’s to be wrapped round him is e’en a most like satin—so soft and fine—and covered with needle-work, till you’d think it must have taken pounds of white sewing-silk, and a year o’ time for to do it!”

“Nonsense, Jane! you must have been dreaming,” said Peggy, in a tone of utter incredulity. “You’ll never make me believe that Mrs. Powell would spend so much in any such folly. No, indeed! her money’s always invested in a way to keep bringin’ something in.”

“Well, seein’ is believin’, they say,” said Jane, “and I’ll go and fetch the child down, and you may see for yourself.”

She did so, and was fully satisfied with the astonishment expressed in Peggy’s face, as she examined the little one’s finery for herself. She had barely time to do so, before Mrs. Powell’s sharpest tones summoned Jane from the hall.

“What are you doing with the child out there?” she asked, wrathfully. “Bring him here this instant! It is time now that we were half-way to the church.”

“Well,” muttered Peggy, as Jane hastily obeyed, “all that there finery was n’t never bought with *her* money. I’d take my oath on that; and I’d like to know where it all come

from. I wish I'd had time just to look at the under-side o' them clasps, to see if there was any 'nitals there to give a body an idee where they did come from."

Nina was not less surprised than the old servant-woman; for, though not so capable of judging of the probable cost of her little cousin's christening robes, she could yet see that they were far more expensive than she would have expected her aunt to afford. Having gone, in company with Essie and the boys, to morning Sunday-school, her first sight of the babe arrayed in his new finery was obtained in the church, as he was carried forward to receive the sacred rite.

"Oh, Aunt Comfort," she cried, following Mrs. Powell into her room on their return; "how beautifully you dressed little Ned this morning! I saw Mrs. Townley and Mrs. Pomeroy look at him, and then at each other; and Mrs. Pomeroy laughed and winked at Mrs. Townley; and she frowned, and bit her lip, as if she was very much provoked; and then they leaned over and whispered to each other. I don't see why they should, unless it vexed them to see him so much better dressed than their babies ever are—for he looked real sweet, and behaved beautifully."

"Don't come to me with such gossip, especially on the Sabbath, Nina," Mrs. Powell answered, severely—though secretly hugging herself with delight at this proof of her success in her effort to excite those very feelings of envy in the breasts of her two most intimate friends—ladies who had hitherto been able to quite eclipse her in the richness of their own and their children's attire. "You should have been attending to the service, instead of thinking of finery and watching the conduct of your neighbors," she continued. "I should be surprised at such wickedness shown by a member of my family, but for the fact that you have never given me any reason to expect better things of you."

"Well, Aunt Comfort, I know I'm not half so good as I ought to be," said the little girl, with a sort of mock humil

ity, "for I never can help seeing what is going on right before my eyes; and those ladies sit just in front of our pew; and I'm sure I thought you put those beautiful things on your baby on purpose for people to look at."

"Nina, your impertinence is perfectly insufferable!" exclaimed Mrs. Powell, in great displeasure. "How dare you suspect me, *me*, of such unchristian, such worldly and wicked motives?"

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Comfort; but I really did n't mean any harm," Nina answered, serenely. "What a beautiful handkerchief this is that you wore round your neck this morning," she remarked, picking it up from the bed where Mrs. Powell had laid it a moment before on taking it off.

"Let that alone!" cried the latter, almost snatching it out of the child's hand, while a sudden paleness overspread her face.

"But those are not your initials. I can't make them out, but I'm sure there's neither C nor P there," said Nina, surprised at both that fact and her aunt's behavior. "Why did n't you have it marked with your own name?"

"You have entirely too much curiosity," replied Mrs. Powell, taking her babe from the nurse, and beginning to strip him of his finery. "That handkerchief was given to me by a very dear friend, who had had it for years."

"Oh, yes; and of course you value it all the more for having her initials on it," said Nina, as her aunt paused and colored, slightly embarrassed for a moment by the consciousness that she was not telling the exact truth; she, however, recovered herself almost instantly.

"You seem to be able to think of nothing but finery and folly to-day," she said, sharply, as, with an admiring exclamation, Nina stooped to examine the coral and gold armlets that looped up the babe's sleeves; "you had better go and get your Bible or catechism. You are not wanted here at present, and might be more profitably employed elsewhere. Go!"

“You need n’t order me away, Aunt Comfort; I’m always ready enough to go as soon as I know I’m not wanted.” And hastily leaving the room, she went slowly down-stairs, and entered the dining-room, where Peggy was setting the usual cold Sunday dinner on the table.

“Where do you suppose all that finery came from?” Peggy asked, stepping to Nina’s side, and speaking in an undertone.

“She says a friend gave her that beautiful, fine handkerchief with the splendid lace on it; and I presume she bought the other things,” replied the little girl, returning Peggy’s keen, inquiring glance with some surprise.

“No,” said the old woman, shaking her head; “nobody need tell me Comfort Powell would ever spend that much on finery for a baby, or for anybody else. She could n’t spare the money that them things cost, if she would, and she would n’t if she could. No; I was a thinkin’ they might ha’ been yourn when you was a little youngster; some that your ma had put by and kept; may-be hoping she might have another some day, or to give to you when you should grow up—though I should n’t have thought she could have afforded it, either.”

“Oh, no,” replied Nina, decidedly; “I don’t think it could be that, because I never saw them before; and if it had been as you think, mamma would certainly have shown them to me. She had kept a few little things I’d worn when I was a baby, and she often showed them to me.”

“Well, it don’t seem likely; but then where did Comfort Powell get ’em?” grunted Peggy, nodding her head in a meditative way, as she went on with her work.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## UNDER SURVEILLANCE.

NINA had been an inmate of Mr. Powell's family for about three years, when he removed from Philadelphia, in order to take the superintendence of a large cotton factory, which had been offered him at a very much more liberal salary than he had hitherto received.

In most respects, the change was a pleasant one, especially to the children, who greatly enjoyed leaving the heat, dust, and turmoil of the city for green fields, meadows, and orchards; and thought Millcote, the new cottage home — with its vine-covered porch, flower garden, and fruit trees, a vast improvement upon the one they had left.

Nina was decidedly of that opinion, yet sorely missed the sympathy and kindness of her city friends, the Tripps. She had no young companions here, and no school, but studied at home, and recited to her aunt, learning her lessons by the most determined and persevering improvement of every spare moment; for as she grew older, Mrs. Powell heaped more and more upon her, till by degrees she became child's-nurse, housemaid, seamstress, and occasionally cook.

Well had the affectionate aunt redeemed her pledge that she "would make *it pay*" to have Nina there. At fifteen — at which time we will look in upon them again — the young girl had become exceedingly useful, doing more work, and that more satisfactorily, than any hired servant that could have been obtained; while, instead of paying her wages, Mrs. Powell was receiving, from the trustees of the Oakdale property, sums amply sufficient to pay her board, and clothe her handsomely. Yet the child's wardrobe was allowed to become very scanty and shabby; and did she complain or

ask for anything new, she was reproved for pride and love of dress, and coldly informed that what she had was good enough for her there in the country, and far better than she deserved.

All this was very hard to bear, but Nina seldom allowed herself to get into a passion under a sense of injustice and cruelty, as in former days. She had gained a surprising power of self-control, and keenly enjoyed the consciousness that the air of cool indifference with which she now usually received her aunt's sharp rebukes was far more irritating to Mrs. Powell than her most furious fits of rage had ever been.

Always beautiful as a child, Nina was yet more so in her fresh, young girlhood; form and features were cast in nature's most perfect mould; her complexion was absolutely faultless, and every movement full of grace. Not the most unbecoming dress Mrs. Powell could contrive could hide it even from her own envious eyes, which was a sore trial to that paragon of perfection; especially when she perceived that a change was coming over Homer, and that he was beginning to steal admiring glances at the hated interloper.

It was a beautiful evening early in June. Nina sat under a tree in the front yard, with her lap full of flowers, which she was making into wreaths for the three younger children, Essie, Belle, and Ned, who were grouped about her, eagerly watching the skilful movements of her slender, white fingers, (Nina's hands *would* be white and shapely, in spite of all the work her kind aunt could heap upon her,) and listening to a story she was telling for their entertainment.

"What a pretty group!" thought Homer, looking up from a book he was reading on the porch; "and how wonderfully beautiful Nina is. I can't see why my mother keeps her dressed so shabbily; any other girl would look horrid in that skimpy, faded calico; but nothing can spoil her face or figure."

Mrs. Powell had just stepped into the doorway, and an angry flush rose to her brow as she noticed the direction of Homer's glance, and how full of admiration it was.

“You seem to be deeply interested in your book,” she remarked, in a tone of irony, not too agreeable to her son’s ears.

“I was,” he said, coloring slightly, “till the voices of the children attracted my attention to that pretty group. Mother, you ought to buy Nina a new dress. I don’t wonder she refused to go to church in *that* horrid thing. Why, it’s hardly decent for her to wear at home.”

“Since when have you found it to be your place to teach your mother her duty?” asked Mrs. Powell, in her severest tone. “I suppose the next thing will be to tell me I have done very wickedly to punish her for her obstinate refusal to accompany the rest of the family to the sanctuary!”

“I think her refusal was very natural under the circumstances, and that a fortnight’s confinement on bread and water was a severe punishment for the offence. She has grown pale and thin under it, and did not succumb at last, did she?”

“No; she is a most depraved girl, obstinate as a mule, and utterly devoid of any appreciation of her religious privileges, or any gratitude for their possession,” said his mother, compressing her lips, and directing a glance of intense aversion at Nina. “I would have conquered her, if I had kept her six months in her room; but, as you know, circumstances interfered. Peggy broke down entirely, and Nina’s services about the house became indispensable. As it is, I shall have to send for some assistance from the village.”

She crossed the porch, stepped upon the grass-plot, and, drawing near to the group under the tree, addressed Nina in the freezing tone that seldom failed to rouse all that was evil in the young girl’s nature.

“You are spending your time profitably, as is seemly and fitting after a fortnight of idleness.”

A vivid color rose on the pale cheek, and the brilliant black eyes flashed, as the answer came from the full, red lips, in tones as cold and calm as Mrs. Powell’s own.

“Enforced idleness is no crime; but even that cannot be

laid to my charge, since the wretched state of my wardrobe gave me full employment during my late seclusion."

"Ever the same impertinent girl, Nina! I am often surprised that even my Christian forbearance has been so long able to endure your presence in my family, and the influence of your pernicious example upon my children. Thankful I am that the counter-influence of my life and precepts has preserved them from contamination. But I did not come out here to wage a war of words with one so unworthy of even such notice from me. I want you to go down to the village, and engage Mary Haggerty to come and assist with the ironing to-morrow."

"Very well, madam, I will do so," Nina answered, tossing the flowers and the half-finished wreath into Essie's lap; and taking from the grass, where she had thrown it on seating herself, a coarse straw hat trimmed with faded ribbon.

"Oh, mamma, may n't we go, too?" cried all three of the little ones, in eager, coaxing tones.

"No, you may not," was the curt rejoinder, as Mrs. Powell turned and retraced her steps to the house.

Little Ned began to cry, and Nina waited a moment, to caress and soothe him into good humor, promising to finish the interrupted story on her return, if his mother would permit.

Homer put his book into his pocket, and was at her side as she reached the gate.

"I'll go with you," he said, condescendingly, feeling that he was conferring a great favor, and that Nina could hardly fail to appreciate the honor done her—for was he not a fascinating and handsome young gentleman, almost as well dressed as any dandy in the city? while Nina's toilet would hardly bear comparison with that of a respectable housemaid. "Even poor company, they say, is better than none," he added, with a self-complacent chuckle.

"I don't think so," she answered, coldly. "I should much prefer to go alone."

He was holding the gate open for her, and she stepped past him as she spoke, and moved on down the road.

Homer was astounded. Could it really be possible that she did not desire his company? He could not believe it. This was sheer coquetry; it could be nothing else; and he hurried after her.

She quickened her steps, as she heard him following; but he exerted himself, and presently overtook her.

“You could not have meant it, Nina,” he said, as he gained her side. “You were afraid I was tired with my day’s work, and wished to spare me the fatigue of the walk: but I am not too tired to accompany you.”

“That is a pity,” she answered, with bitter irony, “since I have already told you I consider solitude far preferable to your company.”

“Now, Nina, what’s the use of putting on such airs with me—your own cousin?” he said, pettishly; “what’s the harm if we are fond of each other? I am sure we ought to be, after living together for five years—”

“Years in which you have been so kind and sympathizing, that no brother could be dearer.”

Her tone was more bitter and scornful than before.

“Well, I won’t deny that I did n’t appreciate you properly at first,” he answered, with a slight blush; “but I do now; and you ought to let by-gones be by-gones; it is very unchristian to hold malice.”

“Then I shall do it,” she cried, with sudden energy. “I make no pretensions to Christianity, and never mean to. One such Christian as your mother is quite enough in one house. And now I wish you’d go away. If you knew how I hate you, you’d not force your disagreeable company on me.”

“Very well, miss! The day may come when you’ll repent of this,” he replied, walking off in high dudgeon.

Mary Haggerty was the old woman of the cake- and apple-basket whom Essie Powell had been so surprised to find one day seated on her mother’s front steps. She had haunted the

neighborhood from that time ; and shortly after the removal of the Powells to Millcote, had appeared in that vicinity.

Close by the factory was a hamlet, formed by the small tenements occupied by the workmen and their families. Mary had got possession of a shanty on a common a little beyond this village, and now supported herself by boarding some of the millmen, taking in washing, or going out occasionally to do a day's work for Mrs. Powell, or any one else from whom she could obtain employment.

When Nina came in sight of the charwoman's humble dwelling, her eyes were still sparkling, and her cheeks burning with the excitement of the passage at arms with her cousin.

Mary's evening work was done, and she sat in her doorway smoking a pipe. Taking it from her lips as Nina drew near, and rising to drop a curtsy, "Good-evening, miss," she said ; "wull ye be plazed to come in till me poor hut, and take a seat? I'm glad to see your purty face the day. An' is it well ye are?"

"Very well, thank you, Mary. But I cannot go in ; I have hardly time ; and it is so pleasant out of doors," said Nina, taking off her hat and using it as a fan to cool her flushed cheeks. "I came on an errand, and must hurry home again. My aunt sent me to ask if you can come up and help us with the ironing to-morrow? Peggy is down again, — not able to be out of bed, — and there's more work than the rest of us can do."

"Indade, miss, and I should think so," rejoined Mary, with warmth, looking up admiringly into the beautiful face ; "for sure you're a born lady, as any fool can see wid half an eye ; and should n't be expected to work at all, at all."

Nina smiled. "My aunt is of quite a different opinion," she said ; "for she is constantly telling me that work is just what I was made for. But can you come?"

"Yes, miss ; sure an' it's glad I am to get the job, an' I'll be there by seven o' the clock the morn."

Expressing her satisfaction with the answer, and bidding the old woman a kindly "good-evening," Nina turned, and went on her way.

"Och, thin, she's the purtiest creetur that ever I see," muttered Mary Haggerty, gazing after the retreating form; "and as pleasant spoken a lady as one wud meet in a day's thavel. It's plain to be seen she's no kin to that sharp-tongued woman she calls her aunt. An' who is she? and for what am I paid to kape sight of her? If the ould witch manes her any harum, it's not Mary Haggerty that'll help her to do it."

Nina lingered on her way homeward, for she felt weak and weary, and the summer evening air was very pleasant. Doubly so, after having been forced to spend so many of those charming June days shut up within the four walls of one small room. She avoided the village, by taking a short cut across the fields, more to escape meeting Homer — who she suspected might be waiting for her there or about the factory — than to shorten the distance; for it necessitated the climbing of two or three fences, and took her over ploughed ground and through damp grass.

"If I were a fashionably-dressed young lady it would hardly do; but these short, scanty skirts, which Aunt Comfort thinks plenty good enough for me, can be easily taken care of," she said to herself, with a bitter smile and a scornful downward glance at them, as she turned aside from the beaten track, gathering them up with care, lest they should become soiled by contact with the dust and damp.

Nina was no longer the careless, heedless child Mrs. Powell had brought from Oakdale. Bitter experience of numberless reproofs, and many severe punishments, had at length taught her the neatness and carefulness which her aunt esteemed above all other virtues. The fences were scaled and the fields crossed without damage to her clothing, and she had gained the road, still at some distance from home, when a voice called to her from behind:

“Wait, Nina, wait a minute!” and, turning round, she saw her uncle hurrying towards her. “Don’t you want company?” he asked, with a smile.

“Why, yes, when it is yours, Uncle Thomas,” she answered, brightly; for she liked him far better than she did his son. He had never treated her unkindly, or as if he felt himself more righteous than she; and, though taking little notice of her in his wife’s presence, was chatty, and quite friendly in his manner toward her, whenever he found himself alone with her. She felt grateful for this kindness, and, but for her contempt for his weakness of character, would have had a filial affection for him.

“I am really glad to see you out, my dear,” he said, in a fatherly way; “it is always a pleasure to me to have you with us at the table, and whenever the family are gathered together. You have no idea how much I missed you, while —”

He paused, with an air of embarrassment, as he saw Nina’s cheek flush, while she drew up her slight, girlish form to its full height, and threw back her pretty head with an air of offended dignity.

“I did not mean any unkindness, my dear,” he said; “I don’t always quite approve of — Mrs. Powell’s — plans — measures — what shall I call them? Perhaps I ought, but I don’t; and it was no fault of mine that you — were treated just as you have been.”

“I think you could have hindered it, if you had chosen; a man ought to be master in his own house,” replied Nina, with her natural frankness.

“Perhaps so; but I am a great lover of peace and quietness; and you must remember that you are her niece, not mine. Though I think quite as much of you as if it was the other way,” he hastened to add, as she turned from him with a pained expression on her fair face.

“You have been far kinder to me than she,” she murmured, with a slight sigh.



"Thank you," he said; "I'm afraid you have a hard life of it among us. But—don't be offended or hurt, my child, I only say this for your own good—if you would try to put down pride, and do as your aunt wishes, things would go a little easier with you, I'm quite sure."

"If by that you mean that I ought to be willing to go to church dressed like a beggar, I'll not do it, unless I'm dragged there by main force," she answered, with heightened color and firmly compressed lips.

In his heart he could not blame her, and it was a relief to him that, at that moment, his three younger children came running to meet them, laughing and shouting in noisy glee. Belle seized her father's hand, and Essie her cousin's, while little Ned edged himself in between, giving a hand to each.

"Oh, father, I'm so glad you've brought Nina back," he said, "'cause she was telling us a story, and now she'll finish it. Won't you, Nina?"

"Oh yes, do, do, Nina!" cried the others, eagerly.

"Your cousin's tired. Can't you wait till to-morrow?" said their father.

"No, no; we don't want to; and she is n't tired a bit; I know she is n't," cried Belle, pettishly, while Ned looked up wistfully into Nina's face, and Essie caressed the hand she held, asking, in tender, pitying tones, "Are you very tired, Nina, darling? I'm so sorry for you, and I'd rather wait till you're rested; indeed I would."

"But I would n't," said Belle; "she can sit down while she tells it, and then it won't make her a bit more tired."

"I'll go on with it as soon as we get to the house, if your mother will let me," said Nina, as Mr. Powell opened the gate, and ushered them into the garden.

"Don't worry yourself," he said, kindly. "Children, you must n't tease, but just let your cousin talk, or be silent, as suits her."

Nina was in truth very weary; but hers was one of those noble, unselfish natures that shrink at no sacrifice of personal

ease, comfort, or interest for those they love ; and the desire to give pleasure to Essie and Ned would have been sufficient incentive to far greater exertion than it cost her now to seat herself upon the porch, and with Ned's curly head in her lap, and one of the little girls on each side, to resume the broken thread of her story.

But she had scarcely done so, when Mrs. Powell's harsh tones were heard ordering the children to bed, and commanding Nina to take them up-stairs, and put them there.

"And don't be long about it," she added ; "ten or fifteen minutes ought to be ample time ; and you have the clothes to gather in, and to sprinkle and fold, when you come down. You were gone a long while after Mary Haggerty : you must have loitered on the way ; and you have not told me whether she is coming."

"I forgot to ; but no matter, she is to be here bright and early," replied Nina, marshalling the little ones up-stairs as she spoke.

"Don't answer me in that style, Nina," her aunt called after her, in tones of stern rebuke ; "don't dare to tell me it is *no matter*, when you have so shamefully neglected your duty. I will not put up with it."

Nina moved on without attempting a reply. She had become very indifferent to her aunt's incessant fault-finding and scolding, and usually let it pass as no more to be regarded than the idle whistling of the wind.

"My dear, are you not a little hard on that child?" asked Mr. Powell, in his meek, deprecatory tones ; "might it not be well to make some little allowance for the heedlessness of youth? and, in the matter of her dress, for the natural dread of being treated with contempt or ridicule on account of it?"

Mrs. Powell answered only by a look which her spouse was careful not to see.

"She's a beautiful creature!" he went on, warming with his subject ; "such eyes, such hair, such a lovely complexion, faultless features, and graceful as a fawn in every movement,

as strangers have more than once remarked in my hearing. Why, really, Comfort, I should think you'd take pride in dressing her up, and showing her off?"

"I take *pride* in *that* girl!" exclaimed his wife, in almost speechless indignation. "Mr. Powell, you astonish me! I hope I am too good a Christian ever to take pride in anything—least of all in that wicked, rebellious girl, the most hardened and depraved—"

"Oh, come now, wife, that is going too far, and reflecting discredit on yourself; since it is you who have had the entire control and management of her for the last five years," he said, interrupting her, but speaking in a soothing, conciliatory tone.

"I have nothing to blame myself with; I have done my best to train her up in the way she should go; but I must own I have lamentably failed," she replied, with pretended humility. "But, since you were rude enough to interrupt me in the middle of my sentence, I shall say not another word on the subject,—truly a most disagreeable one to me."

Quietly and kindly the little ones were undressed and put to bed, and, leaving them to their rest, Nina was about to go down to do her aunt's further bidding, when a sound coming from the little back room occupied by Peggy attracted her attention. It was a sound of distress—a moan, sigh, or sob, she could hardly tell which, but her kind heart was touched; and, without an instant's hesitation, she hastened on tiptoe to the bedside of the poor old creature.

"What is it, Peggy?" she asked, bending over her; "are you in pain?"

"Oh, child, I'm a weary of life!" groaned the old woman, turning her gray head restlessly from side to side on her pillow; "for what have I left but toil, and pain, and trouble? I'd like to lay me down and sleep forever in the grave."

"Oh, don't talk that way, Peggy," said Nina, soothingly. "You must hope for better times."

“No, no, child; what should ever bring better times to me? I’ve seen my best days long ago,” she answered, with a sad shake of the head.

“May-be not, Peggy; at least I think there are some good ones in store for you yet,” said Nina, cheerfully, passing her hand softly over the snowy locks and wrinkled brow as she spoke. “I have a plan; shall I tell you what it is?”

“If you like, child. It’s pleasant to listen to your sweet voice, let your words be what they will.”

“Ah, Peggy, are you taking up the trade of a flatterer?” asked Nina, with a low, musical laugh. “You must have been learning of Mary Haggerty. But listen to my plan. It is, that when I am eighteen, and can go back to Oakdale and take possession of my own dear little home, you shall go with me, and stay there the rest of your days. And a nice, easy time you shall have, doing just what you choose, and not a bit more. And Kizzie and I will be so kind to you. And your own Maggie shall come and live with us too, if she will.”

Peggy caught in hers the little white hand that was caressing her cheek and hair, and, pressing it passionately to her withered lips, burst into tears and sobs.

“God bless you, child! God in heaven bless you for them words!” she cried. “You’ve the kindest heart in the world; and it’s like a little glimpse of paradise to think of all you’ve been a sayin’; but ah! it’s a long while to wait, and I reckon my old bones will be laid in the churchyard long afore that happy day comes round.”

“Oh no, Peggy; you must n’t be down-hearted, but try to keep up your spirits by looking forward to those better times. That’s the way I do. I say to myself every day, ‘You’ve only three years longer to wait, Nina, and then home, and liberty to do exactly as you please; no more scoldings to put up with, and money enough to live comfortably and dress decently,’—for I’m sure the farm will make me that, with Kizzie to help me manage it, and my own hands to do their share.”

“Oh, yes, child! I don’t doubt it!” said her listener; “I

believe in my heart there's money enough a comin' in from it now to keep you like a lady, if you had your rights; and the time will come when you'll git 'em, I hope; and so do you keep on looking forward to the good days afore ye. It's the nature of the young to do that; but the nature o' the old is to look back to the brightness that's all gone, and will never come no more."

The tone of the last few words was inexpressibly mournful, causing the tears to spring to Nina's eyes; but Mrs. Powell was calling from below in a voice that expressed so much anger and impatience at her delay, that she dared linger no longer, but had only time to press her lips to the wrinkled cheek, whispering, "I'm so sorry for you, poor old Peggy," ere she turned away, and hurried down to the kitchen.

"Do you mean to set my authority at defiance, Nina?" asked Mrs. Powell, severely.

"I had not thought of doing so at present, Aunt Comfort," replied the young girl, indifferently, as she took up the clothes-basket and went out.

Two hours later she crept up to her room so weary and toil-worn, that, scarcely waiting to undress, she threw herself upon the bed, and immediately fell into the deep, dreamless sleep of utter exhaustion. She had been up and at work since four o'clock that morning.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### ORIGINAL STYLE OF COURTSHIP.

HOMER could not readily forgive or forget the rebuff he had received from Nina, and he thought best to punish it by an entire withdrawal, for the time, of all the little acts of condescending kindness which he had lavished upon her of late.

He could not have pleased her better; and her supreme indifference to him and his attentions piqued him not a little. She would pass him in hall or garden, or sit in the same room with him for hours, without seeming even to be aware of his existence; while all the time she was looking so bewitchingly beautiful that he found it no easy matter to refrain from seeking to win a place in her heart.

He fully intended to do so at some future period, and, with his characteristic humility, felt not the slightest doubt of ultimate success; while, for the present, he comforted himself with the idea that her apparent indifference was only assumed to hide her real feelings. But, assumed or not, it was very provoking; and at length he could stand it no longer, and, in order to its removal, redoubled his former attentions. His was a peculiar method of courtship, not at all to Nina's taste; but whether she smiled or frowned at his trite remarks, kept her seat when he took another by her side, or rose and walked away, he was equally sure that she cared for him, and was flattered by his notice; while in truth she was weary to bear with it.

"Nina, my dear," he said, in his most condescending tone, coming into the kitchen, where she was washing up the supper dishes,—doing a part of Peggy's work, in order that the poor, feeble old creature might go at once to rest after a hard day's labor. "Nina, my dear, to-morrow is Sunday, you know, and I have come to try if I can't persuade you to put away your sinful pride, and accompany the rest of the family to church."

"You may spare your breath," she answered, coolly; "for I can assure you beforehand that your pious efforts will avail nothing in this case."

"Hush, hush! you must not talk so; I will not allow it; for, though dreadfully proud and obstinate, you are not half so bad as you would persuade me to believe."

"I don't care a pin what you *believe*, and the only thing I would like to persuade you to *do*, is to go away and let me

alone," she answered, with an impatient, half-indignant gesture, as she hastily eluded the hand he would have laid upon her shoulder.

"Now, don't be a prude, Nina," he said, pettishly, replying to the movement more than to the words; "are n't we cousins? and where 's the harm of my touching you, I'd like to know?"

"You are too good, too holy, and might be polluted by contact with so depraved a creature as I," she answered, with bitter irony.

"I do not fear it," he said, complacently, taking her words in their literal meaning; "for though we are told that 'evil communications corrupt good manners,' yet we are also told to 'do good as we have opportunity;' and I'm sure I could not be about a better work than trying to cure you of that wicked pride of yours. It is *very* wicked, Nina, and you should strive and pray against it. Do try and give it up, for 'pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall;' and how could I bear to see those things come upon you!"

"You need n't trouble yourself," she said, drawing herself up to her full height, and flashing a scornful look upon him; "I don't think I'm in more danger than some of my nearest neighbors."

"Now, Nina, that's not right; you should n't get angry because I'm trying, in my humble way, to do you good; nor be comparing yourself with our neighbors, who have never, to my knowledge, shown any evidence of such pride as yours. Come, promise me that you will go to church to-morrow. Your dress is at least clean and whole; and, if it is old and faded, you know that, in spite of that, you'll look better a great deal than any other girl there."

He paused for an answer, but receiving none, went on. "I think myself that you ought to have a new dress, and I've been trying to persuade my mother so; but she says she cannot conscientiously buy you one till you humble your pride

sufficiently to attend church once in the one you have. But if you will do that to-morrow, I am to purchase a new dress for you when I go to town next Monday or Tuesday. What do you say?"

"That I will *never* go to church in either of the old faded calicoes, which are the only dresses I possess now; and that I want no new one of your selection, or obtained by means of your intercession."

"There, Homer, I hope you are satisfied now that she is quite as irreclaimably wicked and ungrateful as I have represented her," said Mrs. Powell, walking in upon them from the sitting-room, where she had sat listening to the conversation, unsuspected by one, at least, of the speakers. "Nina," she continued, with increasing severity, "'God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.' You must be very hateful in his sight; and if you don't repent, He will punish you with everlasting destruction. '*Pride goeth before destruction,*' as Homer, in his Christian effort to do you good, has already quoted to you."

The fair face flushed, and the beautiful eyes flashed with scorn, anger, and contempt; and, had Nina yielded to the impulse of the moment, she would have flung the dish in her hand at her aunt's head. But by a mighty effort she controlled herself, and, turning silently away, went on with her work as if she had not heard the cruel words.

"Hardened creature!" muttered Mrs. Powell, going back to her sewing, followed by her son.

"Well, Nina; still obstinate?" inquired Homer, coming to her side the next morning, as she stooped to tie Belle's hat and to give little Ned a parting kiss.

They were on the porch waiting for their mother to come down, and the carriage, with Mr. Powell on the front seat, stood at the gate ready to convey the family party to church. Receiving no reply, — a slight shade of annoyance on the fair face alone giving token that his words were heard, — Homer repeated his query.



“Put your question in another shape, and I may possibly answer it,” she said, shortly.

“Will you go with us to church?”

“No.” The tone was decided, almost defiant.

He sighed deeply over her depravity.

“Humility is a beautiful thing, especially in woman, Nina. ‘Be clothed with humility.’ It is a beautiful garment, and if you had it, you would care but little for outward adornments: you would feel that the neat, clean dress you have on was even better than your deserts, and quite good enough for a sinful mortal like you to wear in the sanctuary, where thoughts of dress should never be permitted to intrude.”

“Perfectly true, my son; you do credit to your mother’s training,—which is much more than I can say of some others,” remarked Mrs. Powell, rustling out in a rich black silk. “Nina, we are told that ‘by humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life.’ Will you show yours by putting on your hat and accompanying us to church?”

“Yes, ma’am; on one condition.”

Homer rubbed his hands together, and darted a triumphant glance at his mother, which said as plainly as words could speak, “See what my influence has accomplished!”

She affected not to see it; but, addressing her niece in her coldest tones, asked what the condition might be; adding, “If it is anything reasonable, it shall be granted; though I cannot concede, and must not be understood as conceding, that you have any right to demand conditions of me.”

“It is no matter,” replied Nina, indifferently, “for I prefer remaining at home; but, to please you, and to show that my pride has not yet attained quite the height you imagine, I will go in this dress, if you will wear the one you have just taken off. It is much more genteel in appearance than mine; for it is neither old nor faded, and the skirt is full and long, while mine is very scant, and so short that it is hardly decent.”

A withering look was Mrs. Powell's only answer, though she muttered between her shut teeth, as she swept down the garden path, "Perfectly incorrigible, and the most impudent hussy alive!"

Homer followed her, quite crestfallen, while Nina looked after them with a bitter smile; then turned away with a heavy sigh, and a low, yearning cry, "Oh, mamma, mamma! if you had only lived! I'm growing as hard as a rock, and should have been turned to stone before this, if I had not had my darling Essie and little Ned to love."

Homer followed her, after dinner, to an arbor in the garden, whither she had gone with a book, hoping to secure an hour's quiet reading,—the morning having been spent in sleeping off the fatigues of the week's incessant toil.

She had just established herself comfortably, and opened her book, when, to her great disgust and annoyance, he stepped in, and, seating himself opposite to her, began, "I am extremely sorry that you missed Mr. Turner's sermon this morning, Nina. The text was from the fourth verse of the tenth Psalm, 'The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God.' Mother and I exchanged glances as it was announced, both of us being struck with the thought how exactly it applied to you. And then the sermon, from the beginning to the end, was quite as applicable. I could not help thinking of you all the time Mr. Turner was preaching, and wishing you were there to hear and be benefited."

"You are very kind, but much too charitable for your own good," she answered, sarcastically, while her cheek flushed, and her eyes sparkled with indignation.

"How so? I do not understand."

"You have given the sermon all to me, and kept none for yourself."

"Oh, it did not apply to me! for, whatever my faults may be,—and doubtless *I have some*, in common with the rest of mankind,—I flatter myself that pride is not one of them."

“‘Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us!’” murmured Nina, turning away her face.

“Nina, I want to convince you of your wickedness, and lead you to reform; and I have been at considerable pains to hunt out some texts of Scripture to suit your case,” he went on, with an air of lofty condescension, drawing a slip of paper from his pocket, and flourishing it before her as he spoke.

“You may keep them for yourself,” she said, springing to her feet, and looking down at him with burning cheeks and flashing eyes, while words of passionate indignation poured in a torrent from her quivering lips. “I do not want them! I will not have them! If I had lived with some people—such people as Mr. and Mrs. Tripp—good and kind and humble, more ready to see their own faults than those of others, I might have learned to love the Bible, and perhaps to want to be a Christian myself; but you and your mother have taught me to hate it, and to loathe Christianity. You think it well to fling your texts at me on all occasions; it makes you feel yourselves so good—so much better than poor, sinful me. But the devil can quote Scripture, remember, and so, doubtless, can his children.”

She turned from him, and was gone before he could so far recover from his astonishment as to utter a word of reply. Yet so great were his egotism and self-conceit, that he failed to notice her insinuation.

“Mad as a March hare! I believe she’d have liked to knock me down,” he muttered, as he stooped to pick up Nina’s book, which she had dropped on the ground and forgotten in her haste and indignation. “But how beautiful she looked in her rage! How can my mother be so blind as to call her only tolerably good-looking? Halloo! what’s this? A novel, I declare! I might get you into a fine mess, my pretty tigriss. What would mother say if I should carry this to her? Nothing but the Bible is to be read on Sunday, according to her orders, and novels are forbidden even on week-days.”

He stepped to the door of the arbor, looked stealthily this way and that; satisfied that no one was near, he stretched himself at full length on a seat, and, opening the forbidden book, glanced listlessly over a page or two; then, becoming interested, read rapidly and eagerly till the supper-bell summoned him to the house. He started up then with a guilty look, hastily thrust the book into his pocket, and presently appeared at the table with as sanctimonious a countenance as if he had been engaged in fasting and prayer.

He thought Nina looked troubled, and that he understood the cause. "Now then, I will show her how I can return good for evil,—the unmeasured abuse she poured out upon me this afternoon," he said to himself; "and that will lay her under obligations to me; for of course she is trembling with apprehension at the thought of my mother's anger when she learns the secret of the novel."

He watched all the evening for a favorable opportunity, but none offered till the family separated for the night, when, going to Nina's door, he tapped lightly upon it, more than half afraid of being overheard by his mother.

"What do you want now, Homer?" Nina asked, ungraciously, as, opening the door in answer to his knock, she found him standing upon the threshold.

"Here is your book, which you left on the floor of the summer-house," he replied, offering it to her. "Come now, own that you are obliged to me for bringing it here instead of carrying it to my mother, and thus showing her how well you obey her rules."

"I am not; it is hers and not mine," she answered, coldly. "I found it among some rubbish which she ordered me to clear out of the closet in her room the other day; and I have not read it, nor do I wish to do so. I merely glanced over it, and perceived that it was too trashy for my taste. I advise you to return it to her, as the best thing you can do with it now."

She had shut the door in his face, and he heard the key

turn in the lock, before he had recovered from his astonishment at her unexpected rejection of his proffered kindness; and, with a muttered "Confound it! she's always one too many for me," he hurried to his own room, and threw the book into his trunk, which he locked, putting the key into his pocket.

He walked to the window and looked out, half whistled, checked himself suddenly, and, with another muttered "Confound it! how am I to get round her? the high-tempered piece!" stuck his hands into his pockets, dropped his head upon his breast, and began pacing slowly to and fro across the floor.

"Ah, I have it at last! she can't resist that, I'm sure!" he exclaimed at length, and, ceasing his walk, he hastily prepared himself for bed.

He came down the next morning, carpet-bag in hand, hurried through his breakfast and hastened away, saying he must be off for the city by the early train.

He returned just as the family were sitting down to supper; coming in flushed and heated with his day's tramp over the city, and regarding Nina with a gleam of triumph in his eye, which she failed to see only because she did not look at him.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### OVERWHELMED.

MRS. POWELL put her children to bed herself that night, leaving Nina to finish a piece of sewing which had engaged her own attention through the day.

The weather was excessively warm, and Nina, lighting a lamp and carrying it into the sitting-room, sat down to her task with a weary sigh, and a longing look through the

open window into the garden, where the leaves of the trees and shrubs were gently rustling, and the flowers nodding, in the pleasant evening breeze, as daylight slowly faded into night.

Mr. Powell and Homer were promenading the porch, talking over various matters connected with their business affairs, and Peggy, worn out with the day's toil, had gone to bed.

Nina was very weary, too, but her time of rest had not yet come. There was at least an hour's work still to be done upon the garment in her hands, and her aunt had said it must be finished that night. So she sat patiently plying her needle, her thoughts busy with the past and the future—the dear past of more than five years ago, when love watched over her with tenderest solicitude, and life seemed one long sunshiny day; and the future of three years hence, that looked so bright to her youthful hopes, when she should be the glad mistress of herself and the dear old home.

So deeply absorbed was she, that she started slightly with surprise, as Homer's voice spoke close at her side, asking, "Why do you sit toiling here with that everlasting sewing, when everybody else has given up work for the day, or night, rather?"—for she had taken no notice of his movements, had not been aware of the cessation of the talk going on in the porch, and had heard neither his approach nor the sound of his father's footsteps as he passed up the stairs on his way to bed.

"Because your lady-mother has decreed that this garment be completed before I rest," she answered, in a cold, quiet tone, going on steadily with her work.

"Oh, pshaw! put it away: I'm sure you've done enough for to-night," he said, attempting to take it from her.

But she resisted. "No! I must finish it to-night, or have a battle with your mother; and I'm weary of contention."

"Pshaw! put it down," he exclaimed, impatiently. "I want to talk to you; and I will make it all right with her."

“I have no wish to listen,” she answered, with a slight curl of the lip, “and would much prefer that some one else should be the fortunate recipient of your wise counsels and admonitions.”

“You mistake; I have no desire to reprove or exhort you, but have something quite different to say. Oh, Nina, how beautiful you are! You don’t need dress or ornaments to make you handsome; but for all that, I would like to see you attired like a queen. Look here! is not this pretty enough for even you to wear to church?”

He reached for a package, which he had laid on a chair near at hand, and, hastily undoing it, held up before her a pretty blue *barège*.

“I bought it for you,” he said, exultingly. “I got what the woman said would be a full dress pattern, and I am sure it will be very genteel and becoming.”

“Thank you!” she replied, hardly glancing at it; “but I cannot imagine how one so prudent and saving, as you have always been hitherto, could throw away his money so foolishly. I told you the other day that I would never wear a dress selected by you, or that came to me through your instrumentality; so, of course, it’s being your gift, makes it still more impossible for me to accept it.”

“I can’t see why,” he said, with a mortified air, as he restored it to its wrappings, and laid it aside; “but I have something else I’m sure you’ll like, and that I am determined you shall not decline.”

He took her hand, and hastily slipped a ring on her finger, saying, “Now own that this pleases you. It is of the very best California gold, and cost something, I can assure you. I would n’t have spent as much for anybody else — no, not even my mother.”

He knew that Nina had a fondness for jewelry, — a fondness which his mother had often, in his hearing, condemned as very wicked, and which she had done her best to repress, by withholding from the young girl the watch and chain, the

brooch and wedding ring, rightfully hers, because bequeathed to her by her adopted mother; and also by forbidding her to wear a locket given to her by Mr. Clemmens before his death,—and, knowing this, he had confidently calculated upon a joyful acceptance of this gift, and an immediate and entire surrender of her best affections into his keeping.

It was therefore with extreme surprise and chagrin that he saw her coldly take it from her finger and lay it on the table, saying, in a quiet tone, as she resumed her sewing, “It is very pretty, no doubt; but I could not take such gifts from you, or from any young man, unless,”—the color deepened on her cheek, and she hesitated for an instant; then added, steadily, “unless, I were engaged to him.”

“Oh! is that all?” he cried, eagerly. “Then you need not hesitate to take it, for we will be engaged at once. No matter if we are cousins; though many persons make that an objection, I don’t care for it at all; and you shall now promise to be my little wife one of these days, when we are both old enough to think of marrying, and I have money enough for us to live upon.”

He paused in astonishment at the effect of his words upon Nina. Springing to her feet, letting her work fall on the floor, and hastily withdrawing the hand he had seized, she drew herself up to her full height; and regarding him with flashing eyes, and scornfully curling lip, while a crimson tide rushed over her whole face and neck, “*You!*” she cried—“*you*, Homer Powell, to talk to *me* in this way! You who have always treated me so superciliously; regarding me much as the Pharisee did the publican; you to suppose that I could forget it all, and from hating and loathing you, as I do, and always have, from the very bottom of my heart, could turn in a moment to loving you.”

“Now, Nina, be reasonable, and don’t go to raking up old scores in that very unchristian way,” he said, persuasively, as she paused an instant for want of breath. “I own I was not kind in the first years of our acquaintance, but surely you can-



not say that I have not been of late. Why, I have spent a whole month's salary on you to-day."

"No," she cried, interrupting him in her impetuous way, "it was not for me, but for yourself, that your money was spent! You thought to buy my affections with your paltry gifts. You set so low a value upon my love that you thought it could be purchased! My love, that would be freely given to a noble, generous heart that loved me first, but that *millions* would not buy for such an one as *you*."

"Do you despise me, Nina?" he asked, wrathfully, trembling and growing white with passion, as he stepped menacingly toward her.

"I do!" she cried, waving him off; "I do! I always did, and I always shall!"

"No, you shall not!" he exclaimed, folding his arms, and gazing at her with an expression in which anger, admiration of her exquisite beauty, and the passion of love were strangely blended. "I shall make you love me, Nina Clemmens! I have said it, and I'll do it. No man of iron will, such as mine, ever yet failed to win the woman he wanted—and no more will I. I tell you, the day shall come when you shall listen with delight to the suit you reject so scornfully now, or —"

"No, Homer, that suit must not be renewed. The girl is no fit mate for you, or for any man of respectable family," said Mrs. Powell's voice, in tones which trembled with suppressed rage.

She had entered the room unperceived by either her son or Nina, and both started with surprise and annoyance as they were made aware of her presence.

"I am deeply mortified that a son of mine should have so lowered himself," she continued, with a malignant glance at Nina; "and that you should have had the audacity to reject him!"

"What do you mean, madam? I have a right to demand an explanation of such words!" cried Nina, growing pale

and red by turns. "What do you mean by saying that I—your own sister's child—am not a fit mate for your son, or for any man of respectable family?"

"It will not require many minutes to explain the matter to your entire satisfaction, and Homer's also, I imagine," replied Mrs. Powell, with cruel scorn; "but I must correct an error of yours. You are *not* the child of my sister."

Nina turned deathly pale, and caught at the back of a chair for support, while her burning eyes were fixed on the face of her tormentor with a half-incredulous, astonished look, mingled with wild terror and anguish.

"Her own child, the only one she ever had," Mrs. Powell went on, "just breathed, and died scarcely an hour old; and you were a waif, adopted in its place—a little outcast, without name or connection."

"I don't believe it!" cried Nina, passionately; "I'll never believe it! Mamma always said I was her own child, her own darling child; and she loved me as only a mother could. It is not true! I know it *is* not, *could* not be true! You have always been cruel to me, Aunt Comfort, but this is worse than all you ever did before."

The small, white hands were tightly clenched upon the chair-back, her bosom heaved with sobs, and bitter, scalding tears chased each other fast down the burning cheeks.

Even Homer's heart was touched, and, moving a step nearer, he said, soothingly, "Don't, Nina; don't take it so hard; my mother is only jesting, I am sure. Mother, tell her you were only in sport."

"Do I look as if I was?" she asked, with cold severity; "do I ever speak anything but the truth? No, you know I do not; and yet you can stand calmly by, and hear me insulted, by having my word called in question; my most positive assertions declared to be downright falsehoods."

"I never meant to insult you, or accuse you of falsehood, Aunt Comfort," sobbed the poor child; "but—"

"You need n't Aunt Comfort me any more. I've borne

the disgrace of being considered of your kith and kin quite long enough," said Mrs. Powell, tartly, retreating a step or two, and gathering her skirts more closely about her, as if she feared contamination, and at the same time casting a look of withering scorn and contempt upon the agitated girl.

"Be assured the offence shall not be repeated," replied Nina, drawing herself up proudly, and returning scorn for scorn.

But only for an instant. An expression of acute pain crossed her features, and clasping her hands convulsively together, she sank down upon the nearest seat, asking, with pale, quivering lips, "How and where did you learn all this, Mrs. Powell? and why have I been so long kept in ignorance of facts so important to me?—if, indeed, they are facts; for oh, how can I believe that I am not the child of that darling mother,—"

She could go no further, but buried her face in her hands, while the tears trickled through her slender fingers, and bitter, choking sobs shook her whole frame.

"Impudent, ungrateful wretch! do you still dare to insult me with doubts of my veracity?" asked Mrs. Powell, in freezing tones. "If I were not a model of Christian forbearance, I should order you out of my house this instant; but so far from that, I shall even stoop to give you the proof you so insolently demand. My departed sister, Mrs. Clemmens, (whom, by the way, I must request you never again to speak of as *your mother*,) revealed to me, on her death-bed, the fact that you were a foundling; left an infant, of about a week old, at her door, by some unknown person, on the very day that her own infant was born, and died; and that she and her husband adopted you in its place, exacting a promise from the physician, Dr. Blake, Mrs. Croft, and Kezia Atkins—the only persons, beside themselves and the unknown person who deposited you on the doorstep, aware of the fact that you were not theirs—that they would keep the secret, letting you and every one else believe you to be their own child. A piece

of deceit, for which I must say, I think my sister was greatly to be blamed."

"Hush!" cried Nina, starting to her feet, with the hot, angry blood mounting to her very hair. "I will not hear anything against the dead—the dead who was so kind, so dear to me!" She ended with a burst of passionate weeping, sinking upon her seat again, and hiding her face in her hands.

"Be quiet, girl!" said Mrs. Powell, sternly; "I had more right than you, in her of whom I speak. She told me the facts I have been relating to you; and, in proof of them, showed me a note that was found pinned to the blanket that you were wrapped in."

"Where is it? Let me see it!" cried Nina, starting up in intense excitement.

"You shall," said Mrs. Powell, leaving the room.

It was scarcely five minutes ere she returned, though the time had seemed much longer to the two she had left behind—Nina crouching in the corner of the sofa, in an attitude of utter wretchedness and despair, and Homer leaning against the wall, with his hands in his pockets; a position he had taken some moments before, and still retained, now and then casting a furtive glance at his companion, who, on her part, seemed entirely unconscious of his presence.

"Here is the precious document, which, that you may be convinced of your guilt in daring to doubt my veracity, you may read for yourself," said Mrs. Powell, returning with a slip of paper in her hand, which she spread upon the table, where the rays of the lamp fell upon it, and motioning to Nina to come forward.

The young girl rose instantly, and tottered to the table. Dashing away the blinding tears, she bent eagerly over the paper. Anguish was written in every line of the fair face, but a gleam of joy shot athwart it as her eye lighted on the words, "It is not the child of poverty or of shame,—the parents having been lawfully married," and pointing to them while at the

same time she fixed her glittering eyes upon Mrs. Powell's face, "It is not so bad, after all," she said; "how could you say what you did about my respectability?"

"So you believe that, do you?" sneered the cold-hearted woman. "I trow you will find few others that will. Lies can be as easily written as spoken; and, pray, what other motive could a mother have for parting with her child? what but to hide her own shame and disgrace? No, I have not the smallest doubt but that you are a —. No, I will not say the word; but the child of honest parents, be they never so poor, never so low in the scale of society, because of mere poverty, and want of education and refinement, may look down on you with scorn and contempt. And you have dared to reject my son! You, whose father was no better than he should have been, and whose mother was not an honest woman—not worthy the name of woman at all, but a *thing* to be pointed at, and driven out of all decent society."

"Hush!" cried Nina, almost beside herself; "how dare you talk so to me! I will not hear it! *My* mother could never have been such a creature—no, never, never!"

"You cannot prove that she was not, and I positively assert that she was. I have never had a doubt of it since I saw this paper, and heard my sister's story; and I have always felt that my house was polluted by your presence; yet, in spite of that trying consciousness, and the base ingratitude of your conduct since the first hour of our acquaintance, I have kept you here all these years, and, with truly Christian forbearance and disinterestedness, have acted a mother's part by you; and that only to be rewarded by complaints because I don't choose to waste my substance in dressing you like a lady, in finery most unsuitable to one of *your birth* and station; and, of late, by acts of the most outrageous insubordination."

"A mother's part! wasting *your* substance in dressing me!" repeated Nina, in unfeigned surprise and indignant contempt. "Has my board or clothing ever cost you a cent?"

Have you not drawn upon the estate my dear adopted parents bequeathed me for every penny you have spent upon my food or clothes? Very few they have been, too; for, as you well know, I have not had a single new dress since I came to you, —the poorest of what mamma left, and some of your cast-off ones made over for me, being all that have been added to my wardrobe — while all the time I have been made to work for you and yours; yes, like the veriest slave, since we came here."

"Hear her!" cried Mrs. Powell, with a mocking laugh — "as if she had not come between me and my lawful inheritance! All right-thinking people agree that blood relations have the first claim to property; and, if my sister could have known my sweet children, and realized how much the property would be needed by them, I am sure she would not have left it to you. No doubt if, as so many believe, the spirits of our departed friends are cognizant of our affairs, she now deeply regrets having done so; and if I were you, I would scorn to lay my claim to money and land that rightfully belong to other people."

"I do! I'll never touch a penny of it!" cried the half-distracted girl. "You have robbed me of more precious things than money can buy, and you may take it, too — wicked, cruel, heartless woman that you are! False to the dead, and cruel as death to the living!"

She rushed frantically from the room, and flew up the stairs to her own, never pausing, scarcely drawing breath, till she had locked the door behind her, and flung herself on the floor in an agony of grief, indignation, and despair.

Mother and son looked at each other, the one face expressing gratified malice, without a spark of womanly sympathy for the anguish she had caused in the breast of the beautiful and innocent young creature who had just left them; the other wearing a half-pitiful, half-bewildered look.

He was the first to speak. "You were hard on her, I think. She has scarcely deserved such severity," he said.

“You do well thus to judge and condemn your mother,” she replied, with cutting irony; “especially considering that it was the desire to avenge her insulting treatment of you that led me to make the disclosure I have, and which I had not meant to make so soon.”

“And she is really not my cousin, after all? and you have known it all this time? It seems so strange, and has come upon me so suddenly, that I feel almost stunned,” he said, sitting down, and leaning his head upon his hand.

“It is time to shut up the house and retire,” said his mother, rising, and moving toward the windows. “Come, I want your help.”

He gave it in silence.

“What do you suppose she’ll do?” he asked, pausing at the foot of the stairs, as they were about to ascend.

“Do? Cry herself to sleep, and come down to-morrow morning as proud, ungovernable, and insolent as ever.”

“I don’t know,” he answered, with a doubtful shake of the head. “I don’t understand girls; but she looked terribly cut up; and if she were a boy, and as spirited as she is, she’d run away before morning, and never face us again, if she could help herself.”

“No danger of that,” said his mother, mounting the stairs, while he followed in silence.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### A HOMELESS WANDERER.

**M**EANWHILE, a dreadful, furious tempest was raging in Nina’s breast—fierce anger and hatred toward Mrs. Powell; bitter grief that she could no longer believe herself the child of those who had been to her the dearest

and tenderest of parents, and whose memory was still enshrined in her very heart of hearts; and a keen sense of deepest humiliation at the thought of what her parentage probably was, or at best, would be supposed to be, by a harshly judging world—all these took possession of her by turns, till her poor brain was in a whirl. She could not think or reason; could only feel that a terrible blow had fallen upon her, crushing out all that was bright in the future; that a crisis had arrived when she must do something, she scarcely knew what; but there was a vague consciousness that she must fly from her present home; that she could not, would not face Mrs. Powell or her son again.

For more than an hour she had lain prone upon the floor, wrestling with this terrible anguish, this bitter grief and despair, ere she was able to form anything like a plan for the future. But at last her thoughts began to arrange themselves, and to take shape and form.

“I’ll go away,” she said; “they shall never, never see me again. I’ll no longer pollute this house by my hated presence.”

But where should she go? So young and helpless, without money and without friends; without even a name; for of all these Mrs. Powell had robbed her. She could not go back to Oakdale; she had no claim now upon the dear home of her childhood; and probably every one there had so far forgotten her as to feel no longer any interest in her; for she had heard that Mrs. Croft was dead, and that Kizzie had gone away. And besides, how could she undertake so long a journey alone, and on foot?—the only way that, in her penniless condition, seemed open to her. Alas, how friendless she was! with no earthly comforter or consoler to turn to in this her sore extremity, and knowing nothing of Him who is the friend and helper of all the poor and oppressed.

She had never felt more keenly than at this moment the loss of her whom she had so fondly called “mamma;” and now there was an added bitterness in her cup of grief; the tie



that bound them so closely together had been that of affection only, for she could not doubt the truth of Mrs. Powell's story; knowing that, with all her faults, she was yet incapable of fabricating such a tale.

But with this new bitterness came another thought. Her mother, her own mother, might be still living, and oh, might it not be possible that she could find her? She would not, could not believe she—the mother that bore her—could be what Mrs. Powell had so cruelly asserted. No, no, it was impossible! It was some other than a mother's hand that had laid the helpless infant at a stranger's door; some cruel wretch that had stolen her; and perhaps the gentle, tender mother still mourned her loss with almost breaking heart.

Nina started up at the thought. "I will find her!" she cried; "I will search all over the world till I find her—if she is living."

Alas! that doubt, that fear! how it rushed back upon her, almost extinguishing the sweet, new-born hope. And where, and how could she begin her search? She thought of the fatal paper with which Mrs. Powell had confirmed her story; perhaps it might furnish a clew—she had given it but a hasty examination; she would go down and look for it, hoping that a closer scrutiny might elicit something more than she had noticed in the first perusal.

She rose up hastily, softly unlocked her door, and, stealing noiselessly down to the sitting-room, felt about for it on the table, under the table, all around on the carpet and the chairs, thinking a puff of wind might have sent it off the table. But not succeeding, she groped her way to the kitchen, found and lighted a lamp, and, coming back, renewed her search. All in vain. Mrs. Powell had evidently taken possession of it again; and, with a heavy sigh, Nina sat down and leaned her head upon her hand, in troubled, anxious thought.

A sudden recollection came to her. That black-robed, dark-featured woman, who had accosted her in the street the

first summer of her sojourn in Philadelphia, and shown a singular interest in her — might it not be that she knew all, and more than Mrs. Powell had learned from her sister? that she could tell her of her parentage, if she would? Like a dream, it seemed to her that that same dark woman had come to her once, twice before, when, a very little child, she was at play in the garden at Oakdale, in the deepening twilight; had looked earnestly at her, and had asked, as on that other occasion, what was her name and with whom she lived. Nina shuddered as she thought of it now; though, at the time, she had felt no fear, but had looked up into the stranger's face with simple wonder how and whence she had come; for she had not perceived her approach until she stood close at her side. Nor was it now so much fear that this woman was an enemy, which caused her shudder, as another thought from which she shrank with utter abhorrence — the thought that they might stand to each other in the relation of mother and child.

“Oh, no, no,” she cried, “I will not believe it! It cannot be! my heart does not go out to her in love and tenderness, but rather shrinks from her in horror and dread. Yet I would I could find her, and force her to tell me of my parents, if she really knows who and what they were. But, ah me! I have not the smallest idea where to find her. Oh, where shall I go? and what shall I do?”

Again she sat in deep, anxious thought, pressing her throbbing brow between her hot, feverish hands. Then the kind, motherly face of Mrs. Tripp rose before her; she seemed to hear again the words, spoken by that good woman on bidding her a final good-bye, “If ever you need a friend, come to me,” and at once her resolution was taken. She would go to the city, seek out that one remaining friend, tell her sorrowful tale, and ask for counsel and aid in procuring some sort of honest employment, by which she might hope to gain a decent livelihood.

With Nina to resolve was to act; and taking up the lamp,

she returned to her own room, hastily collected a few articles of clothing, and a few little keepsakes, the relics of happier days, which she put into the small satchel she had brought with her from Oakdale. This done, she changed her dress for one not much better, except that it was fresh from the iron. Three calicoes, all short, scant, faded, and worn, comprised the whole of her stock. An old black silk mantilla, of the fashion of four or five years back, a pair of cotton gloves, and a coarse brown straw hat, were next taken out and laid beside the satchel, and her preparations were complete. Yet no, not quite; taking up a card that lay on the window seat, she traced a few words upon it in pencil, and left it on the bureau.

But there was something more to be done ere she should go away never to return; something that wrung her heart with such grief, such a sense of utter bereavement, as she had not known since the day she wept over her adopted mother's grave. Essie had been her room-mate and bed-fellow ever since their coming to that house, and she lay there now; in calm and peaceful sleep, little recking of the bitter anguish that rent the heart of one she loved very dearly.

"I must not wake her, though it breaks my heart to go away without a word of farewell between us," thought Nina, as, wiping away the hot, blinding tears, she bent over the childish form, taking a last, long, loving, lingering look; then stooping, pressed a light, yet ardent kiss upon the rosy cheek, and passed her hand caressingly over the soft, wavy brown hair.

She tore herself away, gathered up her things, and shading the light with her hand, again softly descended the stairs. On the landing she paused a moment, thinking of little Ned, and of poor old Peggy. But the one was in his mother's room, and the other she feared might detain her; and though it gave her an added keen and bitter pang to do so, she must go without a word or look of farewell to either.

The windows of the sitting-room opened upon the porch,

and, reaching nearly to the floor, afforded easy egress from the house. She gently undid the bolts of the shutters of one, then, having extinguished the light, stepped out, and pushed them to again.

All was silent and still as she stood there, for a moment, listening to the beating of her own heart. The moon was waning, and gave barely light enough for her to see her way; hardly enough to enable her to take a farewell look at the beauties of the home she had loved right well, spite of the many petty trials, and some heavier ones, she had known beneath its sheltering roof. She glanced from side to side, with tear-dimmed eyes, as she passed with light, quick step down the path that led to the front gate; for the clock, striking two, had warned her that there was no time to lose, if she would make good her escape ere the coming dawn should render her liable to be seen by some one who would recognize her, and tell of the direction of her flight. For, though doubtful if they would care to seek for and bring her back, she would not have them aware whither she had gone.

“No; they shall never see or hear of me again!” was her bitter thought, as she pursued her dark and solitary way down the lane that led to the road she must take in order to reach a town, some six or eight miles distant, where she could take a morning train for Philadelphia. Millcote Station, whence, too, there was an early train, lay much nearer; but there she would be sure to be seen and recognized by the villagers.

Among her cherished possessions was a gold dollar, which had been one of her adopted father’s last gifts. That tender recollection made it hard indeed to part with it; but it must now pay her way to the city, for the distance was far too great for her to walk.

It was one of the sultriest of July days; not a leaf stirred on the trees; the sun shone with an intense, burning heat, that seemed to wilt and wither everything exposed to its rays; and the city pavements, as Nina passed over them, scorched and burnt her feet through her half-worn, thin-soled shoes and

well-darned cotton stockings. The heat of the weather, joined to fatigue, loss of sleep, mental suffering and excitement, had brought on a severe attack of nervous headache; her temples were throbbing with pain, and the glare of reflected light from the white shutters and white marble door-steps was almost intolerable to her burning eyes.

It was a long distance from the depot to Mr. Tripp's, and, weary and ill as she felt, she must walk it; for it had taken all but a few cents of her father's treasured gift to pay her fare to the city. Unconsciously, she started in the wrong direction, and did not discover her mistake till she had gone several squares from the right road; thus, unfortunately, prolonging her walk very much. But at last she found herself within a square of her old home; a few more steps would bring her to Mr. Tripp's corner. The thought of meeting those kind friends, whom she had not seen for three long years, seemed to put new life into her sinking frame, and for a moment, her step had almost its natural lightness and elasticity.

But could it be that she had again made a mistake? That was not Mr. Tripp's store she was nearing; no, certainly not; for the window was filled with bonnets, ribbons, and artificial flowers. Poor girl! At that sight her heart sank like lead in her bosom. Yet she thought it might be that the family were still living in the old place; she would ring at the door, and ask. She did so; and, standing on the top step in the hot, broiling sun, waited for what seemed an age.

Then a slipshod, slovenly girl appeared, asking, with a contemptuous glance that took in her whole figure from head to foot, "What's wanted? If you're hunting a place, 't a'n't no use a comin' here; and if you're a beggar, 't a'n't no use nuther; for the misthress she never gives nothin' to nobody."

"I only wanted to ask if Mr. Tripp lives here yet, or if they've moved away?" replied Nina, mildly.

“Mr. Tripp? No; it’s Mrs. Fox, and her daughter, Mrs. Smith. They’re both widdy women; and there’s a widdy man as lodges in the best room on the second floor; but his name’s Tincake or something, not a bit like Tripp.’

“Then they must have moved away,” gasped Nina, in a despairing tone. “*Could n’t* you tell me where they’ve gone?”

“No; don’t know nuthin’ about ’em; never heard tell of sich folks.”

With the last words, the door was slammed in Nina’s face, and she sank down, half fainting, upon the steps.

“Alone in the wide world, without one friend to help or care for me!” she moaned, dropping her face into her hands. “But no,” was the next thought, “I may find them yet;” and gathering herself up, she moved on down the street, with slow and languid step, till she reached a bakery in the neighborhood, where, in former days, she had been occasionally sent by her aunt for a loaf of bread.

The baker’s wife was busy with a customer, and, hardly looking at Nina as she put her question, answered hastily, “Know where the Tripps are? Why, la sakes! Mrs. Tripp’s been dead and buried this two years, and the rest o’ the family’s moved out West somewheres; leastways so I’ve heard tell.”

Nina clung to the counter for an instant, but the woman was counting out the change, and did not notice her; and, recovering from the faint, sick feeling that had come over her at the startling intelligence, the poor girl passed quietly out of the shop with her slow, weary step and almost bursting heart.

“Dead and buried! dead and buried!” the words were ringing in her ears, and scorching themselves into her brain; burning, burning, even more than the fierce rays of that July sun that shone with such a dreadful glare right down upon her poor, aching head, protected from them by nothing but the old brown straw hat.

It seemed to grow hotter every minute as she wandered on

and on, neither knowing nor caring whither her steps were tending. There was fever in her veins, and reason was tottering upon her throne; she was fast losing the power to think or plan, but had vague thoughts of falling down and dying in the street, and that there would be no one to bury her, no one to shed a tear over her sad fate—the young life so early blotted out of existence.

And so she wandered on, till suddenly she found herself under the shade of great trees that spread their branches high above her head; green grass on every side; and the prattle of children at play, and their shouts of noisy glee mingling with the rattling of wheels in the street outside; and the cries of the newsboys, and the venders of fish, vegetables, and fruits. She had unconsciously entered one of the squares of the city; and presently coming to a seat under a tree, she sank down upon it, letting her satchel fall by her side; her head drooped upon her breast, and, for a moment, she dozed.

She was roused by some one seating himself by her side. It was a man, wearing the garb of a gentleman; but there was that in his eye and smile, as he looked into the beautiful face before him, and said, "How tired you are, pretty one; you had better come with me to a place where you can rest and be refreshed," that startled Nina, and made her involuntarily shrink from him in fear and terror.

She rose hastily, and picking up her satchel, hurried away, her dread of the bold, bad man giving her strength for the moment to walk quite rapidly. Glancing several times over her shoulder, she saw that he followed her for a little, then turned off into another path.

But she dared not sit down again to rest in that cool, inviting shade. So out into the hot streets she went, wandering on as before—on and on and on; slowly dragging one weary foot after the other, longing for rest, and for escape from the heat and dust, the noise and turmoil of this busy mart of men, where she was continually jostled and pushed about by the hurrying crowds, but not knowing where to find them. On

and still on, till she had reached the river. She crossed the bridge, the driver of a carriage shouting at her to get out of the way of his horses, and still on she went on the other side, with ever lagging step; while the heavens grew black with clouds, and the air had that oppressive stillness that precedes a coming storm.

But Nina thought not of its approach: she only felt, in a half-unconscious way, that it was some relief that the sun no longer sent down his scorching rays upon her aching head, and wondered dreamily why such a sense of suffocation had come over her, that she must pant and gasp for breath.

What wistful, longing glances she cast at the handsome dwellings, and the neat, pretty cottages, with gardens filled with shrubbery and flowers; and at the groups of happy children, and of bright-eyed lads and merry young girls, who all had homes, and fathers and mothers to love, protect, and provide for them, and knew nothing of how dreadful it was to be without a friend in this cold, hard world, or even so much as a roof to cover their heads.

It gave her a dull, heavy pain at her heart to think of the difference between their lot and hers; for what had she! "Not even a name," as she whispered to herself, with a shiver and a moan, while toiling slowly on and still on, the houses growing more and more scattered, till at last there was nothing on either side of her but open fields and woods.

Then a sudden gust of wind tore her hat from her head and sent it whirling away, and the rain poured down in torrents, drenching her in a moment to the skin, while the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled and reverberated overhead. The storm had come up very fast, bringing with it almost the darkness of night, though the sun had scarcely set; and the torrents of rain quickly turned the dust of the roads to slippery, clinging mud, thus greatly increasing the difficulty of walking; and soon the weary feet refused to carry their tired owner any longer. She had entered a bit of woods,



where she presently dropped down, utterly exhausted, upon the wet grass underneath a giant oak, and stretching herself out on the sodden bed, using her satchel for a pillow, fell at once into a troubled sleep.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### REBELLION IN THE CAMP.

ESSIE POWELL started up in bed, scarcely knowing what it was that had roused her from her slumbers.

“Nina ! Nina ! do you intend to come down to-day ?”

It was Mrs. Powell's voice that called, in its shrillest, sharpest tones, and, at the sound, the little girl sprang out of bed, glancing about the room with startled, wondering eyes. It presented an unwonted scene of confusion, and no Nina was there.

“Mother, mother, what does it mean? where has she gone?” cried Essie, as the door was thrown hastily open, and Mrs. Powell strode in, with a step that bespoke her fully resolved to pour out the vials of her pent-up wrath on the devoted head of the delinquent Nina.

She, too, glanced about the room in astonishment, while Essie, pointing to the half-open bureau drawer, with its contents tumbled together in the wildest disorder, to the discarded dress lying on a chair, and lastly, to the pillow that lay beside her own, said, “Look, mother; she is not here; and she never left her things so before; and see, there is no dent in the pillow; she has n't slept with me at all. Oh, mother, where is she?” she asked, with a burst of tears. “I dreamed that she cried over me, and kissed me good-bye, saying that she was going away, never to come back. Oh, mother, has it come true?” and she clasped her hands together with a frightened look and a bitter, choking sob.

“Hush, you silly child!” replied her mother, severely. “Suppose she has gone! it is nothing to fret about. Let her go, I say, and consider it a good riddance.”

“Oh, mother, but I loved her dearly, dearly, my darling, pretty Cousin Nina!” cried Essie, wringing her hands. Then rushing past her mother into the hall, “Father, Homer,” she called, “Nina’s gone! Nina’s gone!”

“What? Where? Who saw her go?” cried Homer, throwing open his door, and hastily emerging from it, hair-brush in hand and without his coat. “Mother, this is your work!” and he turned almost fiercely upon her. “Why did you drive her to distraction with your cruel words?”

She had followed Essie, and stood in the doorway of Nina’s room, with a card in her hand. “Homer, you forget that you address your mother!” she said, with dignified severity, just as Mr. Powell appeared upon the scene, coming up from below stairs to learn what all the noise and tumult were about.

“What is that? something that she has left?” asked Homer, stepping hastily to his mother’s side, and trying to take the card from her hand.

But she held it out of his reach, and waved him off, with a frown.

“What is that, my dear? and what has excited you all so?” asked Mr. Powell, moving quickly toward his wife, while his eye glanced from her to Homer and Essie and back again.

With a scornful curl of her lip, and an angry glance at her son, she placed the card in his hand.

“I am going away, never to come back,” he read aloud. “What does it mean?” he asked, in surprise and dismay. “Nina gone? But this is not her hand, surely? I never saw writing of hers so irregular and slovenly; why it is scarcely legible!” And he looked inquiringly at his wife.

“Agitation of mind, I presume,” was the sneering reply. “I let her into the secret of her birth—or, more properly

speaking, told her of the mystery connected with it — last night; and it was a terrible shock to my lady's pride; and has, no doubt, led to this sudden elopement."

"Yes, you were terribly cruel to her! You could hardly have been more severe and pitiless if she had been guilty of the crimes you lay to her mother's charge — her mother, of whom you know nothing whatever!" cried Homer, hotly, for the sudden conviction that Nina was lost to him forever, had increased tenfold her value in his estimation and his passion for her; and he was almost beside himself with anger and disappointment.

This very unfilial address did not meet with the reproof it deserved; for Mrs. Powell was literally dumb with astonishment at his temerity, while her husband seemed to lose his sense of it, for the moment, in his righteous indignation that Nina should have been so unkindly and unjustly treated.

"O Comfort, how could you?" he exclaimed. "The Bible says the sins of the parents are not to be visited upon the children; and poor Nina, I'm sure, is not to blame for what hers may have done. Besides, it is all guess-work with us from beginning to end. But here we stand, wasting time in idle talk, while the poor child is probably getting more entirely out of reach every movement," he added, with sudden energy. "Homer, do you run down at once to the village, and find out if she took the train this morning; and, if she did not, do you send out men in all directions to look for and bring her back. She can hardly have gone too far to be overtaken by prompt pursuit, I think."

Homer had hurried on coat and hat while his father spoke, and would have rushed down-stairs ere the conclusion of the sentence, but his mother stepped before him.

"You *shall not* go! I will not have it!" she said, in a low, hoarse tone of concentrated passion; "we are well rid of that wretched, ungrateful creature, whatever you and your father may say to the contrary, and I will not have her brought back to pollute my house and the minds of my inno-

cent children; enough, *quite enough*, that she has already taught my eldest son to treat me with worse than mere disrespect, and to heap undeserved reproaches upon my head; and that only because I resented her abuse of him."

"Comfort," said her husband, solemnly, "what do you, what *can* you suppose will become of the poor young thing if she is thrown upon the wide world without a friend? she, so young, so beautiful, and with so little knowledge of the snares that will be laid for her poor unwary feet?"

"Really, Mr. Powell, the occasion inspires you! you have actually grown eloquent under its influence," she cried, turning upon him with a bitter sneer. "What do I suppose she will come to? To just what her mother did. I have always seen that it was in her, and felt sure that she would come to it, sooner or later; and it has taken a large amount of Christian forbearance to induce me to allow her a home in my house, which it has been my constant endeavor to *make* the home of unsullied purity. Yes, I believe in blood, and that such things are hereditary, — quite as surely as consumption, or insanity, or anything else."

"Comfort, you horrify me!" cried her husband, aghast at the malevolence of her speech; "especially when I reflect that, as I have said, we actually do not know anything whatever of Nina's parents; no, not so much as who or what they are, or were. And could you," he continued, "could you allow that innocent, lovely young creature, loved by your sister as her own child, and committed by her, with her dying breath, to your care,—could you allow her to go to destruction, without stretching out a hand to save her? Would your conscience let you do it?"

"I feel that I have done all, and more than my duty by her already," she replied, loftily, "and I have not turned her out of my house; she went of her own free will and accord; and henceforth and forever I wash my hands of all responsibility in regard to her and her fate. Besides, I tell you, it is merely a question of time—she's sure to turn out badly, sooner or later; I've always seen that it was in her."

"I don't believe it; I never saw a sign of such a thing in her; and I, for one, shall take some trouble to search for her, and bring her back!" cried Homer, hastily putting his mother out of his path, and springing down the stairs, two or three steps at a time.

"Homer!" she called after him, "will you dare to bring her back here, when I have said positively that I will not have her in the house again? Mr. Powell, do you intend to see my authority set at defiance in this manner?" she asked, turning wrathfully to him, as Homer bounded out of the house as though her words had not reached him; and the gate presently swung to with a bang behind him.

Mr. Powell was following him down the stairs, and his wife's shrill tones only quickened his movements.

"Thomas Powell, do you mean to answer me?" she screamed.

"Yes, my dear," he replied, in his usual meek tones, as he paused for a single instant, with his hand on the latch of the back hall-door. "I'll not allow her to be brought here, as you don't wish it; but I must see that a shelter is provided for her somewhere."

Hardly waiting to finish his sentence, he darted through the door, across the porch, and from it down the path to the stable, where he harnessed his horse to the buggy with great expedition.

Mrs. Powell, glancing from the window a few moments later, saw him driving rapidly along the road. Turning to Peggy, with as dark a frown as the old woman had ever seen on her face, "Get breakfast on the table at once," she commanded, through her clenched teeth; "we will not wait for Mr. Powell or Homer."

"Where's Nina this morning?" asked Peggy, looking keenly at her mistress.

"I neither know nor care," was the curt reply, as she stalked majestically from the room.

The next minute, Essie, who had been sent to assist the

younger ones to dress, came in, with eyes red and swollen with weeping, leading Ned and followed by Belle, both of them crying bitterly.

“What’s the matter with you young ones? this is a bad beginning o’ the day,” said Peggy, sharply. At which Essie burst into a fresh flood of tears, and sobbed out the story of Nina’s disappearance.

“Well, well, well!” cried Peggy, dropping the poker, with which she was stirring the fire; “is it possible? I thought something was up! And so she’s actually gone! I’ve wondered many a time she did n’t go; but, poor thing, poor, pretty young creature! what’s goin’ to become of her? She don’t know the ways o’ this wicked world, and who’s to say what harm may come to her? and how’ll they feel that drove her to it?” and she shook her gray head sorrowfully, as she picked up the poker and set it away in the chimney corner.

“Who drove her away, Peggy? who would dare to do it?” cried the children, in excited, indignant chorus: Ned adding, with a doubled-up fist, a fierce look, and a stamp of his baby foot, “I’ll kill ’em when I get a man, so I will!”

“I don’t know; you can ask your mother,” was the only answer they could extract from Peggy.

Neither Mr. Powell nor Homer was seen again till dinner-time; which fact was a vexation of spirit to the affectionate wife and mother, who had looked forward with grim satisfaction to seeing them return somewhat earlier, with a request for breakfast — a request she would have refused with the greatest pleasure. They came in together, looking weary and depressed; so much so, that a glance sufficed to assure her of the utter failure of their attempt to get upon the track of the fugitive.

“So you have returned from your wild-goose chase, neither the wiser nor the richer for your trouble,” she said, mockingly. “I hope my advice and my wishes may be regarded as worthy of some consideration another time.”

"I'm not sorry I went, and have done what I could to find her," replied her spouse, with unusual spirit; "for my conscience would have troubled me sorely if I had not."

"No doubt; your conscience is remarkably tender on some points; pity it does n't lead you to be a little more considerate of the wishes and the comfort of the wife you promised to love and cherish till death should part you from her."

"Why, my dear, wherein have I come short?" he asked.

"If you have not sense enough to see, it would be quite useless for me to attempt to show you," was the very satisfactory reply.

Mr. Powell let it pass unnoticed, while he sighed inwardly over the certain knowledge that other and far more disagreeable strictures upon his conduct were kept in reserve for the privacy of their own room, and the hour of retirement for the night. Mr. Powell had a strong, though secret, sympathy for the much-abused Caudle, and was sometimes more than half inclined to suspect that he was himself the original of that character, and that the author had stolen some of Mrs. Powell's finest efforts.

Little Ned fretted constantly for Nina, and received numerous spankings in consequence; and Essie, who mourned quite as much in secret, was suspected, on account of her tear-swollen eyes, and threatened with a like punishment, if there was not a speedy reformation. Yet no one missed Nina more than Mrs. Powell herself, and she soon informed her husband that they must have another girl to help Peggy, who either would not or could not do half the work of their family.

Two days after Nina's disappearance, Mr. Powell received from Doctor Blake the half-yearly remittance for her support. His first impulse, or rather the first prompting of conscience, was to return it at once, with the news of her flight. But he was very fond of money, — never liked to let it go out of his hands; and he had become so accustomed to using these sums as they were sent in — taking them as payment for Nina's board, etc., — that it really seemed as if they belonged to him.

Then he reasoned with himself that she might return in a few days, probably would ; for how was such a child to support herself? and in that case it would, of course, be better for all parties that the matter should be kept as quiet as possible. Doctor Blake need not hear a word about it.

Besides, Mrs. Powell knew that this money, which had always been paid very regularly, was now due ; and he dared not incur her increased displeasure by returning it without her knowledge and consent. He almost trembled at the very thought of the storm such a daring act would bring about his ears. There had been nothing but clouds and storms in Millcote since Nina's flight, and he could not endure the thought of increasing the murkiness of the home atmosphere. The check was hastily returned to the envelope, and the two were thrust into his pocket.

"Thomas, have n't you heard from Doctor Blake yet?" asked Mrs. Powell, as they sat together that evening after tea ; he reading his newspaper, while she was busy with the week's mending, Homer and the younger children having left the room.

"Yes ; I heard by to-day's mail," he said, as he folded his paper, and smoothed it out on his knee. Then, seeing the determined look in her eye which he had never been able to withstand, he drew the letter from his pocket and handed it to her.

She clutched it with eagerness, hastily pulled out the check, and looked at the amount. "Ah, very good ! better than I expected," she said, with great satisfaction. "This will more than pay off the rest of that mortgage, and it will be a very comfortable thing to feel that the place is entirely our own. You must attend to it at once, Thomas. I don't believe in letting such things slide."

"Nor I, Comfort," he answered uneasily ; "but —but —"  
"Well?"

There was a sharp ring in her voice that did not tend to set him more at ease ; and he was tempted to jump up and run



away from the searching glance of those keen black eyes, like the veriest coward, as he was.

But it would not do; he could not escape her, and an answer she would have, as he well knew. So he stammered out, "I—I'd like to please you, Comfort, but I don't think that money's exactly ours."

He fairly trembled at his own audacity and the look she gave him in reply; but went on, speaking rapidly now to have it over the sooner. "You cannot have forgotten, my dear, that Nina is gone, and *may* never come back; and as the property was unfortunately left to her, and there's nothing due on her account,—the last check having settled everything up to next week,—it seems to me this money is hers."

"Very well; suppose you take or send it to her, then."

The contemptuous tone was not pleasant to hear, and Mr. Powell winced under it.

"You know I cannot do that at present, Comfort," he said; "but she may return, and—"

"And then the money will be ours, as an equivalent for her board, etc.," she interrupted; "and if she never comes, is never heard of again, whose will it be, I'd like to know? Am I not my sister's lawful heir?"

"Next after Nina, of course," he answered; "but suppose we keep and use this money, and she makes her way out to her old home, and shows herself to Doctor Blake? we would be obliged to refund."

"I'll risk it!" was the significant reply.

"You don't think she will go there?"

"I'm nearly sure she will not. She told me she would never touch a penny of the property; and what Nina says, she is very apt to stick to."

"But what will become of her?"

"I have already given my opinion on that point."

The utter heartlessness of her tone shocked him. He could not think of such a fate for that innocent, lovely young

creature, without a shudder; and, for the moment, he almost loathed the woman he called wife.

He rose up hastily, and paced the floor for several minutes; then, coming back to her side, "And shall we go on taking and using these remittances, leaving Doctor Blake to suppose Nina is still with us?" he asked.

"Why not? If she lays no claim to the property, it is mine—as it ought to have been from the first. Would you have it go into Doctor Blake's pocket?"

"And how is it all to end? It must come out at last, I fear, and we will be disgraced, if nothing more."

"We may hear of Nina's death; or, finding her when she is of age, and can execute such an instrument, get her to deed the property back to us; or there will be some other way out of the difficulty; we will not trouble about it now. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'"

Mr. Powell was slightly shocked at this shameful misapplication of Scripture; his conscience whispered, too, that it was not an honest deed they were planning; and his naturally kind heart yearned over their helpless victim—the pretty, innocent creature he had learned to love almost as a daughter; but fear of his wife, and that love of money, which is the root of all evil, conquered; and yielding a half-reluctant consent, he promised to follow out Mrs. Powell's wishes the next day.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### GHOST OR MORTAL?

**J**UST give her the reins, Jarvis; she'll find the right road better than either of us in this Egyptian darkness."

"Dat 's jes what I was thinkin', doctah; it 's de pitchiest dark night dis niggah ever knowed; can't see his hand

afore his face ; could n't ef 't was white as yours, doctah. An' Kate, she 's sensible hoss as the nex' one."

A case of severe illness had kept Doctor Monteith out far beyond his usual hours, and he was returning home over roads made wet and slippery by a sudden and heavy storm of rain, that had not yet ceased ; though at this moment it fell with less violence than at the beginning, and accompanied by fewer peals of thunder and flashes of lightning. But the intense darkness, and the state of the road,—here and there washed into gullies,—rendered their progress, necessarily slow and toilsome.

Doctor Montieth was a good man, a Christian,—therefore not apt to grumble at the weather ; and Jarvis, his faithful man-servant, would have scorned to show less power of endurance than his master : so they jogged on quietly, the one thinking of his patient, the other of the good supper his Dinah was doubtless keeping hot for him at home.

"Hark ! what was that ?" cried the doctor, coming out of his reverie with a start, and laying hold of the reins in a way that brought the old mare to a sudden halt. "There is some one in distress ; hold the lantern, Jarvis, till I see who it is, and what can be done."

He had leaped from the carriage before the words were fairly out of his mouth, and, guided by a repetition of the faint moan which had struck his ear, he groped his way to the foot of a tree not three feet distant.

"This way, Jarvis ; quick, quick, with your lantern !" he cried, as the servant followed somewhat more deliberately.

"Yes, doctah, I 'm comin' ; I 'm right here."

The light of the lantern flashed upon a death-like face, framed in with heavy masses of dripping hair,—a young, delicate face, perfect in outline and in features, with beautifully arched and pencilled brows, and long, heavy silken lashes resting upon the marble cheeks.

The doctor started violently, and his knees shook under him at the sight ; while a low, half-smothered exclamation of

mingled astonishment and pain escaped his lips, and he turned quickly to his servant.

Jarvis was not a whit less moved by the sudden apparition of that death-like countenance. His eyes, which were riveted upon it, seemed ready to start from their sockets, and his dusky face was blanched with terror.

"Come away, doctah," he whispered, with chattering teeth, laying hold of the sleeve of his coat as he spoke, — "it's a spirit a temptin' you with them looks."

"No, Jarvis; the dead has not come back from the grave," his master answered, with quivering lips, as he stooped, and, gently raising the poor, insensible form, took it in his arms; "there is life here, and we must do what we can to save it. Take hold of her feet, and help me to lift her into the carriage. You need not fear," he added, as Jarvis shrank timidly back; "how she came here is a mystery; but there can be no doubt of her humanity: listen to that piteous moan. But I will not ask you to touch her; only hold the lantern so that I can see to get her into the carriage."

Tremblingly, and with teeth still chattering with terror, Jarvis obeyed.

"Now let us get home as fast as possible, for this poor child is wet to the skin, and evidently very ill indeed," said the doctor, resuming his seat, with his dripping, insensible burden resting on his knees, while he supported it with his arm.

"Yes, sah," replied Jarvis, as reluctantly, and still trembling with fright, he followed them into the gig; and, taking up the reins, he chirruped to his horse.

"You're not a goin' to take her to Wald — into your own house, doctah?" he said, presently, in a tone of mingled surprise, inquiry, and disapproval.

"Certainly, Jarvis; what else could I do? You would have had me leave her there to perish, eh? Is it possible I could have been so mistaken in giving you credit for great kindness of heart, as I always have, hitherto?"

The negro's reply was unintelligible, and he hung his head with a mortified air as they drove on in silence through the darkness and the rain, which had begun again to descend in copious showers. The doctor had thrown off his own water-proof coat and wrapped it about his charge; and, forgetful of self, his only anxiety seemed to be to shield her from the storm, and get her under shelter at the earliest possible moment.

He was the first to break the silence, and it was just as they turned in at an iron gate, which seemed to open of itself: and, entering the grounds of Wald,—as he had called his beautiful country-seat,—drove on over a broad, gravelled walk, and underneath the wide-spreading branches of giant oaks and elms, which, though dripping with the rain, yet shielded them in a great measure from the full violence of the storm.

There was agitation in the doctor's voice as he spoke, and Jarvis, who had lived with his master for twenty years or more, and knew his history, did not wonder at it.

"This is not to be talked about, remember that, Jarvis," were his first words. "Mrs. Barron will, of course, hear the whole story from me, and Dinah cannot be kept in ignorance; but this night's adventure must remain a profound secret from all else; and no one ever hear how, or from whence, this young lady came to us. Do you understand, Jarvis?"

"Yes, sah; and I hope you can trust your old servant, sah."

"That I can, my good fellow," replied the master, kindly; and at that instant the carriage drew up at a side entrance.

The lateness of the hour was favorable to the carrying out of the doctor's wishes. His ward, young Marchant de Vere, had retired some time before, and was already asleep; and Rose and Adolphus, the children of Jarvis and Dinah, were also in bed. Dinah had, as in duty bound, waited up, in readiness to admit her master and her liege lord, and to provide them with suitable refreshment after their long battling with wind and storm; but she was nodding in her chair

in the kitchen; so that the only person really awake in the house was Mrs. Barron, — or “Aunt Lettice,” as she was affectionately called by the doctor and his ward, — a distant lady relative of the family, and much like a mother to them both.

She, having come to the conclusion that the doctor might not return before morning, had gone to her room, and was preparing to retire for the night; but hearing the sound of the carriage-wheels, she hastily threw on a wrapper, and went down to admit him, and see that he was made thoroughly comfortable after his exposure and fatigue.

As she opened the outer door, and saw him coming toward it, bearing the unconscious stranger in his arms, she started back, with an exclamation of surprise.

“Quick, Aunt Lettice!” he said; “throw open that bedroom door; and, if you please, let me lay her on the lounge.”

She hastened to obey, asking no questions, rather wondering at the agitation of the doctor’s tones, but ascribing it altogether to the state the stranger was in — whether living or dead, she could not tell; for there was neither motion nor sound as he bore her in and laid her gently down upon the couch.

“A glass of wine! she is terribly exhausted!” he said, huskily, leaning over and chafing her cold hands with an air of intense solicitude.

Mrs. Barron set down her lamp, and ran to the storeroom, where a supply of stimulants was kept in readiness for such times of need. She was gone but a moment, and, as she again stood by the doctor’s side, she caught her first glimpse of the stranger’s face. It so startled her that the glass had well-nigh fallen from her hand.

“Clarence, who — who is she?” she gasped, turning white as a sheet, and trembling from head to foot.

“You see the likeness, too? I was sure you would,” he said, in a voice almost inaudible from emotion, as he raised the drooping head, and held the glass to the pale lips.

With some difficulty he succeeded in pouring a little of the

wine between them. It was swallowed, but with an effort, and his patient's eyes did not unclose; she lay as motionless and unconscious as at first.

"Who is she? where did you find her?" again questioned the old lady, in an agitated whisper.

He shook his head. "Who, or what she is, with a face so marvellously like—" The sentence remained unfinished; but he added, abruptly, "I am as ignorant as yourself: I have just picked her up by the roadside. She is very wet, and extremely ill, as you may see at a glance. I trust to you to make her as comfortable as a warm bath and dry clothing can, and let me know the instant you have finished. I will send Dinah to assist you, and —"

"With all my heart, Clarence. I will go for the clothes at once. But you are wet, too."

"Never mind me; only make haste," he answered, with an imperative gesture; and she hurried from the room.

He stepped to the kitchen-door, and calling to Dinah, who was listening, with open-mouthed wonder, to her husband's excited story of "de young gal de doctor hab picked up by de roadside, with a face 'xactly like our dear dead young missus's," he bade her make haste to prepare a little nourishment for a sick lady, and bring it in as soon as it was ready; and to see that there was plenty of hot water to give her a bath. Then, returning to his patient's side, he laid his finger upon the slender wrist.

She still lay as he had left her, without sign of life, except a fluttering pulse, faint breathing, and now and then a slight moan. He bent over her, eagerly scanning her features, while his manly lips quivered, and tell-tale drops stood in his eyes. Hers were still shut, and he longed to see them open.

"Are they, too, like hers?" he murmured, bending still lower, and gazing yet more intently into the beautiful face, strangely, wonderfully beautiful, even with that death-like pallor upon it. "Oh, my Nina, my darling! I could believe

you were before me now as you were in the days when we first knew and learned to love each other so fondly."

Even as he spoke, suddenly the eyes flew open, and, with a wistful, earnest, upward gaze into his face, she murmured, in low, piteous accents, "Oh, papa, did you call me? your own little Nina? I'm so glad; for they've been very cruel to me; but now you will take care of me; and mamma, dear, dear mamma!"

The white lids drooped again, and the long, silken lashes swept the fair cheek; while the doctor, almost unmanned, turned to Mrs. Barron, who was again at his side. "You heard her? Who is she? who *can* she be?" he whispered, in great agitation. "She has my Nina's own glorious eyes, and answers to her name."

Mrs. Barron shook her head. "It is astonishing—unaccountable," she said, in moved tones. "And how very ill she looks. I must make haste to get her wet clothes off. And while I'm doing it, you go into the dining-room, and get a cup of tea and something to eat. Dinah has it there all ready for you; and if you mean to help nurse this child, you will need all the strength food can give you."

"Yes, you are right; but call me the moment you are done," he answered, hastily leaving the room.

Half an hour later she summoned him back, with the information that his patient was comfortably in bed. "And look here," she whispered, holding up a coarse linen handkerchief to the light, "I have found the name on this. 'Nina Clemmens; ' see!'"

"Clemmens! ah, it is then the little orphan-girl I met on the cars some five or six years ago, for that, I remember, was the name she gave as hers. Poor child! It seems I read that woman's face aright, and her cruelty has driven the helpless young creature out, friendless and alone, into a cold, hard world," he said, deeply moved. "Thank the Lord with me, Aunt Lettice, that He has given her into our care. That wonderful likeness draws my heart to her with irresistible force."



“Mine, too. It is wonderful,” she responded, “wonderful, indeed.”

They spoke of it again many times as they watched together beside the sick-bed; and more than once he said, “If I had not seen my little one in her coffin, I could hardly doubt that this is she, my own, my darling, my Nina’s child and mine.”

Had she been indeed his own child, she could not have had more tender, careful nursing during the long weeks that elapsed ere sense and reason returned, and the months of languor and weakness that followed. Her naturally strong constitution had received a severe shock, and for days her life hung by a thread, which but for this tender care and watchfulness would have snapped asunder.

Dr. Monteith ranked high as a physician, and Mrs. Barron had seen much of sickness, and possessed every qualification desirable in a nurse except physical strength. Of that, too, she insisted that she had sufficient; but the doctor would not have it taxed too far, and the next day provided a professional nurse, who took all the heavy part of the work of caring for the invalid until the crisis was past.

But during that first night, Aunt Lettice never left the sufferer for a moment; and all the rest the doctor allowed himself was taken near morning, on a sofa in the next room, where he was within call.

“You both look quite worn out this morning,” remarked Marchant de Vere, at the breakfast-table, glancing first at his guardian, and then at Aunt Lettice. “Is any one ill in the house?”

“Yes: I have a very sick patient, a young girl who arrived last night after you had retired,” said the doctor, with a grave, professional air.

“Indeed!” said the young man, elevating his eyebrows for an instant, yet not greatly surprised, as it had happened once or twice before, since he had become a member of the family,

that a patient had been brought from a distance to be placed under Dr. Monteith's care.

For the same reason, there was little difficulty in satisfying the curiosity of Rose and Adolphus concerning the advent of the young stranger; though the former wondered to her mother how one so ill could have travelled alone, or if friends came with her, that they should have left so suddenly.

"You dunno nuffin 'bout it, and better hold your silly tongue, you Rose," said Dinah, sharply. "Of course de young lady was n't nigh so ill when she started on de journey, and nobody s'posed she'd git wuss so fast on de way. But, bress de Lord, she's in good hands now; for our doctah 'll fotch her roun', ef anybody kin."

Rose had very aristocratic notions; priding herself greatly on "b'longing to the Monteith family—one o' the best in the land," and would have felt supreme contempt for the stranger-guest had the least suspicion of the truth dawned upon her.

This Dr. Monteith knew, also that Rose had a nimble tongue, and liked an occasional bit of gossip with the servants of the neighbors; and, knowing this, his measures were taken accordingly.

By his orders the clothes of his *protégée* were washed out at once, on being taken from her person, dried before the kitchen-fire, and before morning hidden carefully away under lock and key; those in the little satchel—which Jarvis had picked up and brought home—being placed with the others.

So there were fewer persons privy to the manner of Nina's coming to this new home than to that of her arrival at the other, where she had been so tenderly loved and cherished; and those who were of the despised African race kept the secret as faithfully as any.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## A TERRIFIED INTRUDER.

NINA had fallen asleep upon the sodden earth, with no shelter from the raging tempest save the storm-tossed branches of the tree, through which the rain streamed in torrents, beating piteously upon her uncovered head, while thunders rolled and crashed above her, and the lightning's gleam now and then lit up the scene with its fearful glare, only to make the darkness more intense as it vanished.

Then followed a long, troubled dream, in which she seemed to see new faces, to hear new voices, and to suffer much pain, weakness, and weariness, much distress of mind and body, but to know and understand nothing distinctly. After that came a deep, calm slumber, and she woke to find herself lying upon a luxurious couch, and, as she raised her beautiful eyes to the face of the watcher at her side, to meet a tender, loving, joyous look, such as a doting father might bestow on a beloved child just snatched from the jaws of death.

A noble face it was that bent over her; a face full of intellect, fire, and sweetness, a broad, massive brow, fine expressive eyes, and a mouth that spoke of firmness of purpose united to rare tenderness of heart,—the fellow-feeling for human woe of one who had been no stranger to suffering himself, and, by means of it, had grown strong to succor and to comfort others.

"Where am I?" murmured Nina, feebly lifting her head from the pillow.

"With friends, dear child; with those who would love and cherish you to your life's end," he answered, in low, rich tones that fell like music on her ear.

His finger was on her pulse, but removing it, he poured something into a delicate china cup, which he held to her lips, saying, with gentle authority, "Drink this, my daughter, and go to sleep again."

The words, the tone, seemed to soothe her like a spell, and again she slept a long, dreamless sleep.

The time of her first awaking was in the early morning, while as yet the sun had scarcely peeped above the horizon; but when her eyes again unclosed, it was long past noon, and Dinah, in the kitchen, was busy with her dinner, while anxiously listening for the return of her master and her husband; now and then remarking to her daughter that she feared "somebody would keep the doctor away till the chicken would be all dried up, and the young beets and peas cooked to death."

Wonderingly, Nina looked about her, too weak and languid to raise her head from the pillow, or move even so much as a finger, yet finding a great deal within her circle of vision that surprised and bewildered her. Lace curtains, half-closed blinds, and the waving branches of trees beyond, gave a subdued light to the room, which was large and lofty, with delicately-tinted walls finished with a handsome cornice, and adorned with several fine paintings. A rich carpet covered the floor; marble, rosewood, and satin damask composed the furniture; and the sheets and pillow-cases of the bed on which she lay were of linen, beautifully fine and white. Everything spoke of wealth, taste, and refinement. Her eyes had made the circuit of the room, and, returning, rested upon her own hand and arm, which lay on the outside of the coverlet; the sleeve of her night-dress, of delicately fine cambric and richly trimmed, as might befit the occupant of such an apartment, surprised her more than aught else; and again she murmured, "Where am I? This must be a dream!"

"Ah, dear child, you are again awake," said a soft, sweet voice, and a lovely-looking elderly lady, with beautiful gray curls and a fresh, fair complexion, rose from an easy-chair at the head of the bed and stood beside her. "You have slept

long and soundly, and are looking much better," she added, in her gentle, quiet tones, passing a soft, cool, white hand caressingly over Nina's hair and cheek, then bending down and pressing a loving kiss upon her forehead.

Tears sprang to the young girl's eyes: it was so long since such a caress had been bestowed upon her; for surely it could be naught but the wild fantasy of a dream, that he who had addressed her by the dear name of "daughter" had also laid his lips on her brow in such loving fashion as a tender father might.

"Where am I?" she repeated, looking up wonderingly into the sweet face, "and who are you, dear lady, who seem to love me? and he who called me daughter? and how did I come here?"

"There, how you are tiring yourself! and how the doctor will scold me if he finds you worse," said the gentle, pitying voice. "You are quite exhausted, and must not say another word. You are with friends who love you and think it a pleasure to take care of you. This is Dr. Monteith's house, and it was he who sat beside you this morning; and I am Mrs. Barron, a kind of aunt of his,—Aunt Lettice, he and Marchant call me, and that you shall call me too, dear, if you like."

"Dr. Monteith," repeated Nina to herself, in a low, bewildered tone; "I don't know him. I don't know how I came here. I—"

"There, dear, don't puzzle your poor brain about it," said Mrs. Barron, with another gentle caress. "You have been very ill, and are too weak to think or remember; but it is all right, and you have no need to worry about anything. Here, drink this, like a dear, good child, and go to sleep again," and she held a cup to Nina's lips.

Too weak to have any will of her own, Nina obeyed, swallowed the beef tea offered her, and the next moment was again sleeping sweetly.

The door opened softly, and with noiseless step Dr.

Monteith drew near the bedside. A glad smile stole over his face as he gently laid his finger on the sleeper's pulse, gazed earnestly at her, and then turned to Mrs. Barron.

"Better?" she whispered, inquiringly.

"Yes; God be praised!" he answered, in a low tone, tremulous with emotion; "the crisis is fully past, and with such nursing as you can give her, Aunt Lettice, we may hope soon to see her restored to health."

Dr. Monteith was regarded with reverence and warm affection by every member of his household, one and all of whom had strongly sympathized with him in the deep anxiety he had evidently felt for Nina, during the two weeks of violent illness she had passed through, since her sudden and mysterious appearance among them. Their faces had reflected the sadness and care that overshadowed his; and now they rejoiced in his joy, as they saw that the cloud was lifted from his brow, and heard his glad announcement that the danger was well-nigh past, and his patient in a fair way to recover.

Nor was their rejoicing all mere sympathy with the loved and revered head of the house; for the youth, beauty, and apparent friendlessness of the stranger had excited in the younger portion a deep interest on her account; an interest which was much intensified by the remarkable resemblance to the doctor's deceased wife, which the elder ones saw in her, and spoke of with such emotion.

A prior engagement had called the professional nurse away this morning, and Rose was sent in to sit by the bedside while the family were at dinner; Adolphus taking the duty usually assigned to her of waiting upon the table. She placed herself where she had a full view of the invalid, and sat gazing, with a sort of awe, upon the still, white face among the pillows. *So* still and *so* white it was, that presently a sudden fear struck her that the doctor might be mistaken; and she leaned forward, listening intently for the sound of breathing, drawing a long, though suppressed sigh

of relief when she had at length satisfied herself that it was not the sleep of death she was looking upon.

She was glad when Mrs. Barron returned and bade her go to her dinner; and when, on the conclusion of the meal, Dinah remarked "that one of them ought to sit beside the sick-bed and let Mrs. Barron take a nap,—she 'd lost so much rest of late,—while the other washed up the dishes and set things to rights in the kitchen," she eagerly expressed her preference for the latter employment, and urged her mother to go to the sick-room, reminding her of her superior skill in nursing.

"True 'nuff, Rose; I have had a good deal more spience o' nussing than you," replied the mother, changing her check apron for a white one, and smoothing down her dress; "and you can do up de work here just as well as me, if you choose. So see that you do it, and don't be noisy 'bout it, nuther. Remember, no singin' or loud laughin' or talkin' while the young lady's so sick. The doctah has give partic'lar orders that the house is to be kept quiet."

She had reached the door, but turned back to ask, "Whar you goin', Dolph? what you gwine to do with yourself?"

"I'm to help father harness just now, 'cause the doctah is a goin' out agin; and after that I'm to weed in the garding," answered the boy.

"Very well," said his mother; "but look out you don't come whistlin' round the house."

An hour later an elderly woman, dressed in calico gown and sun-bonnet, and carrying a basket of berries on her arm, might have been seen to open a side-gate leading into the grounds of Wald, and walk leisurely up the path toward the house, apparently enjoying the change from the heat and dust of the road without to the shade and coolness within.

"Sure an' they must be rich folks that live here," she muttered to herself, glancing admiringly from side to side as she wound about among the shrubbery, now and then getting a glimpse of the lawn, where a fountain was sending up its cool showers of spray, while in its white basin ducks were idly

swimming and gold- and silver-fish darting hither and thither, or of the gardens, gay with flowers of every hue. At length she came in full view of the house, which its distance from the road, and the number and size of its shade-trees, had at first partially concealed from her sight. It was the rear of the building she was approaching, much less imposing in appearance than the front, yet sufficiently attractive, and indicative of wealth and luxury, to cause her to stand still and gaze for a moment in silent, perhaps envious, admiration, ere she ventured to cross the plot of soft, velvety grass that lay between her and it, flecked with the sunshine as it shimmered through the trees, whose leaves were dancing and nodding in the wind.

She plucked up courage at last, hurried over it, stepped upon the wide, cool porch that encircled two sides of the house, and with cautious tread—for the perfect quiet of the place struck her with a kind of awe, she could have scarcely told why—drew near an open door, and knocked gently; at the same time glancing in to see if the room was occupied.

It was the kitchen, as she had surmised; but so comfortably furnished, and so exquisitely neat, that she half doubted if it were. No one was there; for Rose, having finished her work, had run up to her sleeping-room, directly above, to “smarten up a bit for the evenin’,” as she was wont to express it. She heard the knock, but was not prepared to answer it immediately, and refrained from calling out lest her voice should penetrate to the sick-room; and the woman, after waiting a moment and repeating her knock, walked in, and kept on her way through that and the dining-room into the hall beyond, nor paused until she had reached an open door. But there she suddenly stood still, gazing straight before her, with blanching cheek and dilated eyes, as if transfixed with horror and amazement at the sight which met her view.

The room had but two occupants—Nina, quietly asleep upon the bed, and Dinah, nodding in an easy-chair by her side. It was upon the still, white face of the former that the



woman's eyes were riveted ; and as she gazed and gazed, cold drops of perspiration stood on her brow, and she shook and trembled in every limb.

"Who told you to walk in yere? Come right away, this minute!" said Rose's voice, in a loud whisper, at her elbow. "Come!" she repeated, plucking her by the sleeve, "this is n't no place fur strangers; and you must have forgot your manners, if you've got any, to come all the way here without no invite from nobody. Now what do you want?"

The last query was put as they reached the kitchen, the woman having submissively followed Rose thither.

"Who, who is it?" she gasped, dropping into a chair, and setting her basket on the floor, while she lifted her apron and wiped the sweat from her brow.

"Why, the doctor's patient, to be sure! her that's been a lyin' at death's door this two weeks, and must n't be disturbed on no account whatever. But what business is it o' your'n, I'd like to know?" returned Rose, loftily, folding her arms, and gazing severely down at the offender.

"Oh, of course, 'tis nothin' to me; nothin' at all, at all, dear," replied the woman, with an effort to appear unconcerned, but trembling more than ever.

"I don't see what you axed for, then," remarked Rose. "But you a'n't told your business yet: did you come for to sell them berries?"

"Yis, dear; and won't you ast the mistress if she'll have a few for tay? them's Lawton berries, ye see, an' very fine ones, too. My son-in-law he's a gardener, ye see, an' —"

"We don't want none," interrupted Rose, with a scornful toss of her head at the berries, which the woman was uncovering with her shaking hands; "we've got a heap finer in our own garding. You'd better take 'em to town."

The trembling hands covered them over again, and, without a word, the woman rose and moved submissively toward the door.

But turning back upon the threshold, she asked, "What's the name o' your mather?"

"Master!" repeated Rose, in great disgust. "I a'n't no slave; and you a'n't nobody, or you'd a knowed this was Wald, — Dr. Monteith's place. Now be off, and don't keep me standin' here a talkin' to you."

"Now, if that don't beat all! 'Pears like she was skeered at the very sound of the doctor's name!" she added to herself, stepping to the door, and looking after the woman, who was hurrying away as fast as her trembling limbs could carry her, muttering, though so low that Rose could not hear the words, "It's him, then, it's him; and it's her, too; oh yes, it must be her!" And she glanced shudderingly at the windows of Nina's room as she passed, then crossed herself rapidly two or three times, muttering a prayer to the Virgin as she turned the corner of the house, and sped down the path to the gate.

There she met Dr. Monteith face to face as he alighted from his carriage. He lifted his hat and spoke with his usual polite and friendly manner toward rich and poor alike; but she averted her face, and, brushing hastily by, sped on down the road as if she expected to be pursued, and brought back against her will.

"How strangely the woman acts," remarked the doctor, looking after her. "Do you know who she is, Jarvis?"

"No, sah; don't believe I ever see her afore," replied the coachman, as much surprised as his master. "But I'm feared she's been at some mischief in de house. Hope she has n't had her dirty fingers on de silver, doctah. Shall I go after her, and fetch her back?"

"Oh, no; not until we have more reason to suspect her than merely her rudeness and haste. If she has taken anything, it is probably only a little fruit, which we can very well spare," answered the doctor, in his pleasant, kindly way, and, opening the gate as he spoke, he passed into the grounds, and walked with quick, firm, elastic tread toward the house,

thinking he would inquire about the woman, but ere he reached the door forgetting her entirely, in his deep interest for the young patient awaiting his arrival.

In the meantime, the old berry-woman kept on her way in fear and haste, never stopping for an instant until, almost exhausted, she entered the door of a small frame tenement, distant a mile or more from Wald, and setting down her basket, sank half fainting into a chair.

“Och, mother, and what’s the matter?” exclaimed a tall, raw-boned Irish woman, who stood combing out her hair before a little, cracked looking-glass that hung on the wall. “Shure an’ ye have n’t sold the berries already?”

The old woman shook her head, with a groan and a gasp for breath.

“But what’s the matter?” repeated the daughter, laying down her comb to run for a cup of water, which she held to the old woman’s lips; “you’re enough to scare a body out o’ her wits, with yer pale face, and yer groans and yer gasps. Have you been taken sick?”

“No, no, Katy, child,” she answered, putting the cup aside, after swallowing a mouthful; “but I’ve seen her—her with her white face restin’ on the pillows that’s hardly as white as it, an’ her long black, silky hair a streamin’ over ’em,—the white, white, dead face as has haunted me this many a long year,—och, the miserable woman that I am!” And she covered her face, shuddering and groaning, and rocking herself to and fro on the chair.

“Mother, are ye going daft?” cried Katy Murphy, in a loud, shrill tone, taking her parent by the shoulder and shaking her not too gently; “I know niver a word what ye’re talking about. What have ye ever done that anybody’s face should haunt ye? an’ how could the dead come back after all them years?”

“I don’t know, Katy; I could n’t tell; but there she was, as sure as me name’s Judy Flanagan; she with her dead face—white an’ dead an’ cold,—but wid it all, the beautifullest that ever I see.”

“Mother, be quiet; don’t ye see there ’s a stranger here?” whispered Katy, putting her lips close to Judy’s ear.

“Who? who?” asked the old woman fearfully, ceasing her groans and her rocking motion, and looking up wildly into her daughter’s face.

“A woman that came in with a basket o’ pins an’ buttons, and sich like, fur to sell; an’ asked could she stop an’ rest a bit,” replied Katy, still whispering, and standing so as to screen her mother from the stranger’s view; “so don’t be afther talkin’ no more nonsense till she ’s gone.

“What sort o’ a place did ye say it was where ye see the sick woman as frightened ye so, mother?” she asked, in a louder key; adding, in the same tone, “an’ no wonder, for it might be something catchin’; and ye would n’t like to bring disease home to me an’ the childer, sure.”

“That I would n’t, Katy,” replied the old woman, taking the cue, “for ’t was ill indade she looked, poor young thing; but it ’s a very fine house; an’ it ’s good nursin’ she ’ll have and good doctorin’, too, for the nigger wench she said he was the best doctor about here, and the folks come from a long way to have him doctor ’em,—this one did, she said.”

“What ’s the name, ma’am, if I may be so bould? an’ where is it he lives?” asked the stranger, getting up from the chair on the farther side of the room, where she had been sitting for the last half-hour, and coming eagerly forward, “fur ye see I ’ve got the rheumatiz awful bad, an’ may-be I could get him to cure me.”

“Is it Dr. Monteith, mother?” asked Katy, anxious to get rid of the stranger, and a little impatient at seeing her mother hesitate in her reply.

Judy nodded assent, and Katy added, “An’ it ’s a big, grand place; jist about a mile away, in yon direction,” pointing with her finger.

“Thank yees a thousand times. It ’s right there; I ’ll go an’ see what he ’ll do for me, the good gintleman! An’ it ’s

obliged I am for the rest, ma'am." And the stranger taking her departure, with her basket on her arm, pursued her way leisurely along the road in the direction of Wald.

"I do belave it's her, as sure as me name's Mary Haggerty," she muttered to herself; "an' me luck has turned at last. It's a long hunt I've had; but did n't I track her to Philadelphia afther a warld o' throuble? an' did n't I find her hat out here under a tree? an' did n't I overhear the folks at the other grand house talkin' about the beautiful young lady that had come to Dr. Monteith's, an' nobody knowin' nothin' o' how she got there? I belave it's her; an' I'll make sure of it afore I'm an hour older; an' thin I must send word to her, — the ould witch, — an' it'll save me the stoppin' o' me nate little income that I git fur kapin' the darlin' always in sight."

"Well, I do declare! two old women with baskets in one afternoon!" muttered Rose, looking up from her work and seeing Mary Haggerty approaching, though still at some distance.

Rose had finished her toilet, after Judy's departure, and, bringing down her sewing, had established herself very comfortably in the back porch; and she had no mind to be disturbed. So she gave but a gruff rejoinder to Mary's bland "Good-avenin, miss; an' would ye like to buy a thrifle of a poor ould crathur? a row o' pins or buttons, or an illegant bunch o' shoe-strings, as chape agin as ye'd git 'em in the city stores?"

"No; we don't want none o' your old trash here, so ye may jist as well clar out first as last."

"But I've got some purtier things than thim as I've mentioned," persisted Mary, seating herself on the step by the indignant maiden's side, and opening her basket. "See here, thim's illegant intirely, rale gould and precious stones!" she said, holding up a card on which were stuck some half-dozen or more of brooches — bits of colored glass

set in pinchbeck, — “an’ I’ll sell ye one for half what it cost me, seein’ it’s you, an’ let ye take your pick o’ the lot, too; an’ that’s the best offer that ever ye had.”

“How much?” asked Rose, looking at them with longing eyes.

“Fifty cints for any one o’ thim beauties.”

Rose hesitated; and the woman, holding up a quarter of a yard of cherry-colored ribbon, said, “An’ I’ll throw this in, too. You’re a nice lookin’ girl, — though mab-be I should n’t say the like to your face, — an’ it wad become yer red cheeks an’ purty black eyes.”

Rose was conquered. “Stay here a minnit!” she exclaimed, and jumping up ran for her purse.

Mary listened intently till the sound of the girl’s feet ascending the back staircase conveyed to her the assurance that she would be unobserved for a short space, — a covert glance around the spot had already satisfied her that no one else was in the vicinity, — then rising hastily, and leaving her basket where it stood, she walked with quick, but cautious tread, toward that part of the building where Nina’s room was situated; the half-closed shutters leading her to suspect that it might be the invalid’s apartment.

Fortune seemed to favor her; for just as she placed herself opposite the window nearest the bed, peering cautiously in, very fearful of being seen by those in attendance upon Nina, a puff of wind blew aside the delicate lace curtain, and gave her an instant’s distinct view of the beautiful white face resting among the pillows. The curtain fell again and shut out the view, but Mary had seen enough to satisfy her that she was right in her conjecture; for, spite of the ravages of illness, that face was not to be mistaken for any other.

With a low, inarticulate, half-smothered exclamation of delight, the old creature turned away, and hurried back to the place where she had left her basket, reaching it just in time to assume the appearance of not having moved, when Rose returned with her purse in her hand.

Their bargain was soon concluded ; Rose became the happy possessor of the brooch and ribbon ; and Mary, pocketing the silver, took up her basket and went on her way, rejoicing far more, however, in the knowledge she had clandestinely gained than in the fortunate sale she had effected.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### DOUBTS, HOPES, AND FEARS.

AS strength and memory returned, Nina's countenance grew sad and troubled, and she shrank with sensitive pride from the caresses and endearments of her new friends ; thinking, fearing, that they little suspected upon whom they were bestowing them. She had several times heard the voice of prayer and praise coming from some distant part of the house. She seemed also to remember whispered words of supplication offered by her bedside, while she lay in a half-unconscious state ; and from these, and a word dropped now and then from their lips, she had gathered that this, like the one from which she had fled, was a professedly Christian household ; and she thought within herself that, when they should learn her secret, they too would spurn her from them as Mrs. Powell had done, and tell her to begone, lest the purity of their home should be sullied by her presence.

Alas ! she felt like a guilty thing in keeping it to herself ; yet how could she bear to reveal it while still too weak to rise from her couch and go away again out into the wide, wide world, friendless and alone ? They were so kind, so very kind and tender in their manner toward her ; and it was so sweet to be treated thus, after the long, long years of hun-

gering and thirsting for such love and care ; and how could she say the words that should change those loving glances into looks of aversion and contempt ; those terms of endearment to harsh, cold, formal phrases, and make a desert waste of this blooming paradise ?

Dr. Monteith saw that something weighed upon her spirits, — that some struggle was going on within her breast, and greatly retarding her recovery ; and though he had, at first, tried to discourage her from either talking or thinking, telling her there was no need, and that he only wanted her to be quiet and rest, and get well, he now determined to endeavor to learn what her trouble was, that he might, if possible, remove it. He came to this resolution one afternoon, on returning home, for the third or fourth time, to find her restless and ill at ease, with traces of tears on her cheeks, and evidently losing ground. They were alone, for Aunt Lettice had gone to the library to write some letters, he having volunteered to take her place in the sick-room. Nina half averted her face and closed her eyes on hearing his step approach, for she would fain have hidden her emotion from him. But he saw that she was not asleep ; and bending over her, while his fingers encircled her wrist, “What is it, daughter ?” he asked, in gentle, tender tones. “You are sad and troubled, when surely you have reason to rejoice and be glad on account of your spared life and returning health. Do you know that you have been very near to the gates of death ?”

“I wish I had passed through them ! Oh, why did you bring me back ?” she cried, the bitter tears forcing themselves from beneath the drooping eyelids and coursing down her pale and wasted cheeks.

“So young and fair, and yet already weary of life ?” he asked, deeply moved.

“What have I to live for ?” she murmured, in a choking voice ; “a homeless, friendless, nameless orphan ?”

The tones were inexpressibly mournful, and the moisture gathered in his eyes as he listened.



“No, dear child, not homeless, if you will accept the shelter of my roof; not friendless, while I live,” he answered, soothingly, while his hand passed caressingly over her hair; “and surely not nameless; for we found a name upon your clothing—‘Nina Clemmens,’—the name of a little orphan I met on the train from New York to Philadelphia some five years ago. Do you not remember it? Are you not the very same?”

“Yes, sir,” she answered, lifting her eyes with an eager, searching look; “and now I know why your face has seemed like a forgotten dream: you were so kind, so very kind to me then—you are now. Yes; I am the same, and yet not the same, for I have learned that I have no real right to that name,” she added, with a hopeless sigh and sad, averted face. “Ah, you don’t know whom you have taken under the shelter of your roof, and invited to remain beneath it. If you knew it, you would think my presence pollution,—you who are so good and pious,—and would bid me be-gone.”

An expression of mingled surprise and pain swept across his features, as he listened to her strange, wild words and bitter, despairing tones. He was silent for a moment; then said, gently and kindly as ever, bending over and almost laying his lips to her cheek as he spoke, “I have thought you pure and innocent, as you are young and fair; but if it is not so,”—he paused slightly, then went on, his voice trembling with emotion,—“yet is there forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared.” He said, “Neither do I condemn thee,” and could I treat you with scorn and contempt,—I who am your fellow-sinner,—it would evidence that I possess little of the spirit of the Master whom I profess to love and serve.”

“Aunt Com—Mrs. Powell always told me I was the most depraved child she ever saw,” Nina answered, in the same weary, hopeless tone; “proud, passionate, wilful, and wicked; and so I was;—yes, so wicked that I would not go to church

in an old faded, scanty calico, and sit beside her in her rich new silk. But *that* was not the great reason why she considered my presence so polluting; no, it was because, because—I never knew it—she never told me till that night I ran away,—it was because I was n't her sister's own child at all, but a poor, friendless babe left at her door, and nobody knows who or what my parents were; only Mrs. Powell persists in believing that—that my mother was, was—oh, I can't say it! I don't believe it! I never *will* believe it!" And the beautiful eyes which had been flashing with indignant anger and pride filled with tears, sobs choked the voice already tremulous with grief and passion, and the blushing face was hidden in the small, white hands.

He lifted her up, gathered her to his bosom, and folded his arms close about her; and she made no resistance, but let him do as he would: and laying her head on that broad, heaving breast, like a weary, home-sick child, wept out all her grief and anger there.

He did not speak for many minutes. The words telling him she was a waif, had sent a strange thrill through his heart, awakening for an instant a wild wish, almost a hope, preposterous as the next moment reason showed it to be. He had lost an infant daughter, who, had her life been spared, would now be just the age of this fair girl, who was the very image, and also bore the name of his deceased wife. How strange the coincidence! how his heart ached with a longing wish to know that she was indeed his own,—a treasure for which he would have freely given all his wealth,—and yet he knew it *could not be*; for *his* child slept in the same grave with her mother.

But at length Nina's tears had ceased to flow; the tide of feeling had evidently greatly exhausted her still feeble frame, and, laying her gently down upon her pillows, he administered a soothing draught, saw her eyes close in sleep, and stealing softly from the room, entered the library, where Mrs. Barron was still busied with her correspondence.

“Clarence!” she cried, in a startled tone, as she looked up on his entrance, and caught sight of his pale, agitated face, “what has happened?”

“Aunt Lettice,” he said, laying his hand on the arm of her chair, and gazing down at her with an eager, questioning, almost entreating look, “does it seem to you even barely possible that my child, my daughter, may yet live?”

“Oh, no; how can you ask such a question?” she said, shaking her head with a half smile of incredulity. “Why, did we not all see the little darling lying dead in its poor mother’s arms? both in one coffin, and buried in one grave? How could you ask so strange a question?”

“True, too true, alas!” he said, with a heavy sigh; “but —” he paused, then spoke rapidly, and with a trembling eagerness in his voice, “children have been exchanged; those two women were all who were present at the birth —”

“No, no, Clarence; it could n’t be possible,” she answered, hastily; “a strange suspicion of the like haunted me at the time,—that oily-tongued woman, with her exceeding suavity of manner, her cloying sweetness of voice and speech—always roused suspicion in me that she was not what she seemed, always gave me the impression of a serpent in the grass; and that led me to scan the face of the dead babe very closely; when I found it bear so remarkable a resemblance to the mother, that I could no longer harbor the smallest doubt that it was indeed hers.”

“Yes, you are right,” he said, with another deep-drawn sigh; “for I too looked again and again very earnestly upon the little face, and marked the wonderful resemblance, so unusual in a babe that had but breathed and died, and which increased tenfold the poignancy of my grief at its loss. And yet,” he continued, turning and pacing the floor, “though reason tells me it is impossible that this lovely young creature—so marvellously like my lost wife, my own beautiful Nina, so strangely thrown in my way, and just the age that my daughter would have been—can be mine, my heart con-

tradicts it, and tells me that she is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh ; yes, it yearns over her with all the parental love and tenderness I should have felt for that other one had God spared her to be my solace and treasure all these years."

"Then, Clarence, let your heart have its way : what is to hinder such happiness to you both? and to me," she added, her gentle, kindly face glowing with delight at the thought.

"It is the very question that has been tugging at my heartstrings ever since I brought her home," he answered, with a beautiful smile. "Yes, I am quite resolved to adopt her, if she will consent."

"Ah, no doubt of that ! Who could refuse to accept such a father?" exclaimed the old lady, with a glance of proud, motherly affection at his handsome, kindly, noble countenance and fine manly form.

"Ah, Aunt Lettice, I fear you are but a partial judge of my merits," he answered, with an affectionate look and smile. "Yet, methinks my love and care should exceed what any other father ever gave his child !"

Nina's first waking remembrance was of that tender, fatherly embrace given her immediately after the dreaded revelation of her sad secret ; and tears of happiness filled her eyes, while her whole heart went out in filial love to him who had bestowed it. What would she not have given to be indeed his child, always to live with and be loved by him. Daughter was the name he almost always used in addressing her, and it sounded inexpressibly sweet to her ear ; yet she had not thought that he meant to adopt her ; and grateful as she felt for all his kindness, still her sensitive pride shrank from the thought of dependence, or laying herself under increased obligations to those upon whom she had no claim of kindred. She had been taunted with it once ; she would not, if she could help it, lay herself open to the charge again ; but as soon as sufficient strength returned, she would go away into the wide world, and earn her bread by the labor of her own hands. For surely where there was so much work to be done,

there must be something suited to her capabilities; and a will so determined as hers could not fail to search out and secure it.

Such were the thoughts that passed through her mind as she lay there gazing at the sweet, placid face of Aunt Lettice, and dreamily watching the rapid motion of the knitting-needles.

“Ah, dear, so you are awake again?” remarked the old lady, looking up with a pleasant smile. “Has your nap refreshed you?”

“Thank you, ma’am; I think it has,” replied Nina. “How very kind you are to me; you and Dr. Monteith, too.” And her eyes filled with grateful tears.

“He is always kind,” said the old lady, with a look that spoke more plainly than any words could have done her loving admiration for him; — “kind to the sick, the sorrowful, and all who are in trouble or affliction of any sort. He has known heavy trials — almost heart-breaking sorrows — himself, and they have taught him true and tender sympathy for others.”

“Yes, there is something in his face that made me feel sure he had suffered,” said Nina, the tears springing to her eyes again; “and yet he looks happy, too.”

“And he is,” said Aunt Lettice; “‘sorrowful, yet always rejoicing’; happy in his Saviour’s love, and in the thought of the bliss — far beyond all that we mortals know — of those dear ones gone before, and the certain hope of one day joining them in that heavenly home.”

“Oh, tell me about it, if you think he would have no objection to my hearing it,” said Nina, half raising herself from her pillow in her eagerness.

“I do not think he would object, dear,” replied Mrs. Barron; “but it is a long story, and I hear his step in the hall now; besides, the tea-bell will ring presently; but tomorrow, when we are settled for the morning, you shall hear it.”

Nina did not forget to claim the fulfilment of Mrs. Barron's promise when the appointed time arrived ; and the old lady, nothing loath,— for it was a tale which never lost its interest to her, — began at once.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE STORY AUNT LETTICE TOLD.

I AM distantly related to Dr. Monteith, as I believe I have already told you," she said : " his grandfather and mine were first cousins. But I am much older than he, as is quite evident from our appearance," she added, with a smile ; " he is not much over forty, while I am nearly sixty-five ; so, out of respect for my superior age, he always calls me aunt, though we are really cousins.

" His parents and I were very intimate, and strongly attached to each other ; and when, at thirty-two, I was left a widow and childless, they urged me to come and make their house my home ; which I did. They were living here, and Wald has been my home, or one of my homes, ever since. Clarence — that is, Dr. Monteith — was an only son, and inherited the place from his father.

" Besides the doctor's parents, I had one other very intimate and dear friend, a lady who was twice married. She had one child by her first husband, Nina Hamilton ; a perfect marvel of beauty, and as good and sweet as she was lovely. She was beloved by all who knew her, and was the idol of her step-father ; so much so, that I have sometimes suspected that he married the mother as much, or more, for the child's sake than for her own ; though she was herself a very lovely and lovable woman, and they lived very happily together.

" He outlived his wife, and at his death it was found that

he had bequeathed to Nina the bulk of his property, which was very large,—a million or more of money, besides a beautiful country-seat on the banks of the Hudson, and a handsome residence in New York City.”

“So beautiful, so rich, and so beloved, how happy she must have been!” murmured the listener.

“Wealth and beauty are not to be despised; yet they do not always bring happiness, my dear; nor does earthly love,” said the old lady; “and though our sweet Nina was, I believe, as happy as mortals ever are in this world of sin and sorrow, I am very certain that her chief treasure was not in these. She had been the wife of Clarence Monteith for nearly two years when her stepfather, Mr. Delacourt, died; and they were most tenderly attached to each other. They had a beautiful babe, too, a son, the image of his father, and esteemed by both parents a greater treasure than all their wealth. Mr. Delacourt had a half-sister, who was a bigoted Romanist, and the mother of two or three drinking, gambling, spendthrift sons, and a daughter who had married a man of the same sort, and was, perhaps, little or no better herself. They had property, but were wasting it very fast; and I several times heard Mr. Delacourt express his determination that they should not have the opportunity to do the same with his. He left his sister an annuity sufficiently large to support her comfortably, even should she be left dependent upon it alone; but that was all: her children were not mentioned in the will. Some few thousands were bequeathed to various religious and charitable institutions, while the bulk of the property was, as I have said, given to Nina and her children forever.

“Mrs. Craven, his sister, was very angry, as you may suppose, and even talked of contesting the will; but was discouraged from doing so by her lawyer, who told her that she would certainly lose the suit. So she gave it up, and made friends with Nina; who, however, had never been other than friendly toward her. She was a very plausible, oily-tongued

woman, a great talker, and very demonstrative in her manner, especially toward Nina and her husband and child—lavishing caresses upon the mother and babe, and sweet words upon them all, in a way that was very disgusting to me, and to Clarence, also, I could see; though he said nothing, as far as I know.

“I used to scold myself roundly for doubting her sincerity; but really I could not help it; and I was very loath to have her with my dear children, as I used to call Clarence and Nina, unless I could be there, too, to watch over them.”

“Why, you could hardly think she would murder them?” exclaimed her listener, inquiringly.

“I really could not have told what I feared,” replied Aunt Lettice; “but I felt that she was not to be trusted.”

“Old Mr. Monteith died shortly after his son’s marriage; his wife years before; and so, as Mr. Delacourt could not bear to be without his daughter for a day, and was also much attached to his estate, they passed most of the year there while he lived. Afterward, they divided their time between the two places; and as they always seemed to want me with them, I seldom let them go to Avonmore without me. And Mrs. Craven was nearly as sure to be there as I.

“Nina had never been well from the time of her baby’s birth; and her father’s sickness and death wore on her very much. Her grief for his loss was deep and lasting, for she fully returned his affection; and at length she became so completely prostrated that the physicians ordered her off to Europe.

“Her husband went with her, of course, and she was very anxious to take her little boy, then nearly a year old; but neither the doctor nor Clarence would consent; so he was left behind in Mrs. Craven’s care and mine. Nina would not share my doubts of her professed ardent love for the child, but still she felt that he would be safer with more than one guardian—at least, unless that one was myself, so she said; and not liking to hurt her aunt, as she called Mrs. Craven, by refusing her urgent request to be permitted to



take charge of little Clarence, she begged me to stay behind and share the responsibility. 'I shall be easy about my darling, if I know you are with him, Aunt Lettice,' she said; 'but I cannot feel quite safe in trusting him to any one else.'

"So I stayed, though it was like losing a piece of my heart to see her sail away without me, and she so ill, too; but she had her husband to take care of her; and she was hardly dearer to me than little Clarence, with his pretty baby ways and his face so like his father's.

"All went well for a time; letters came regularly, each one telling of Nina's improving health, and expressing the hope that they would soon be able to return: while I could write as favorably of the little boy, who was thriving nicely.

"Mrs. Craven had quite taken up her abode at Avonmore; but did not interfere with me at all in my management of house, servants, or child; except that she would now and then give the little fellow things that were not good for him, merely because he reached for or cried to have them. I remonstrated; but she always excused herself on the plea that she was too fond of the child to refuse him anything.

"They had sailed early in February, and about the middle of July we received letters from them, saying Nina was quite restored, and, if nothing happened to prevent, they would be at home again by the first of October. We were all in raptures, Mrs. Craven making greater demonstrations of delight than any one else. But the very next day brought a letter from the husband of my only sister, telling me that she was lying at the point of death, and was constantly crying out for me.

"I was greatly distressed. I could not refuse to go to my dying sister, and yet I knew not how to leave my little charge; and it was quite impossible to take him with me. But there was his nurse, a woman who thoroughly understood her business, and had been about him ever since his birth, to say nothing of Mrs. Craven, who had brought up a family of her

own, and who professed the strongest affection for both the child and his mother. I was afraid of her over-indulgence; but the nurse promised me faithfully that the child should never be out of her sight for a moment, should be allowed to eat nothing improper, and should be carefully guarded from exposure to the damp or to extremes of heat or cold, etc., etc.; and that if he should show the slightest symptom of illness, she would send immediately for the family physician, in whose skill we all placed great confidence.

“It did not occur to my recollection until afterwards that this nurse was one of Mrs. Craven’s own choosing, having been selected by Nina on her recommendation; and it was not very strange that I forgot it; for they always seemed to rather dislike and avoid each other—the nurse making frequent complaints to me of Mrs. Craven’s unwise indulgence of the child; and the lady, in her turn, complaining that the nurse was impertinent and cross-grained, and hinting that I would be wise in sending her off, and procuring a better.”

“And so you went?” said Nina, inquiringly. “I don’t see how you could help it; you could not let your own sister die without you.”

“No, I felt that I could not; and so I went,” replied the old lady, heaving a deep sigh.

She was silent for a moment, an expression of deep sadness resting upon her countenance; then went on.

“I found my sister extremely ill; no one thought she could live twenty-four hours; and yet it was nearly three weeks before she breathed her last; and in all that time I had had but one letter from home; written four days after I left, and reporting little Clarence in fine health and spirits, and everything going on smoothly. Mrs. Craven had promised to write daily, and her unaccountable silence filled me with alarm.

“I hurried back to Avonmore the moment the funeral was over, and travelling all night, arrived there at seven in the morning; a bright, beautiful summer morning, but darker and more dreary to me than the stormiest winter night when

I had reached my destination and learned what that mysterious silence meant. Mrs. Craven met me at the door, habited in the deepest mourning, and weeping bitterly. I felt at once that it could not be from sympathy with me in my loss, and, almost fainting with dread, I asked what was the matter.

“‘Ah, Aunt Lettice,’ she sobbed, ‘how can I tell the dreadful tidings? Our precious darling is no more; he lies yonder in the valley, by the side of my beloved brother.’”

“I was stunned, paralyzed by the suddenness of the terrible blow,” continued the old lady, weeping at the remembrance; “and what followed for the next few hours is a blank to me. It was some time before I could hear and comprehend the whole of the sad story. I heard it from Mrs. Craven’s own lips. The nurse was gone before my arrival; had been so completely overcome by grief, Mrs. Craven said, that she could not be prevailed upon to stay a day after the darling was laid in his grave; and whither she had gone no one knew.”

“Yes, she had caused his death by some carelessness or neglect, I dare say!” exclaimed Nina, indignantly.

“Mrs. Craven did not blame her,” replied Mrs. Barron; “she said she could see no reason to blame any one; but the child was suddenly taken ill; the family physician was sent for at once, but was absent from home, and another being called in his place, recommended the seashore, and they set off immediately for Long Branch. The little fellow seemed to rally there for a time, then grew rapidly worse, was seized with convulsions, and died. One change following another in such quick succession, that they had hardly time to think of writing either to me or the parents till all was over. Then, as they knew I could not leave my sister, they thought it best to let me remain in ignorance of the sad event until my return.

“They brought the little corpse home, and buried it the next day; and the weather being very warm, the coffin was not opened for the servants to take a last look, as some of them wished very much to do.”

“And the poor father and mother? how did they bear it?” asked Nina, wiping away a tear.

“I was spared the sad task of telling them of their loss,” said Mrs. Barron; “Mrs. Craven having written immediately. They grieved very much; but time had dulled the edge of their sorrow somewhat ere they returned; though at first it seemed to be renewed by the sight of the places associated with the memory of their darling,—the silent nursery and the empty crib; and I shall never forget seeing Nina weeping over and kissing the little clothes and toys I had laid carefully away, hoping to prevent her grief from being recalled by the sight of them. She made no parade of her sorrow, and was very cheerful in her husband’s presence, and perfectly submissive to the Hand that had dealt the blow; yet it was evident to any close observer that the loss of her first-born son was a very heavy trial to her loving heart.

“But her health was much improved; many other blessings were still left her, and at length she seemed quite herself again,—almost as gay and happy as before the loss of her father.

“I have never seen a more tenderly attached couple than she and Clarence were. He was not in any business at that time,—had not studied medicine, though he sometimes talked of doing so,—and they were seldom apart for an hour.

“But now I come to the saddest part of my long story,” said the old lady, pausing to wipe away a tear. “Little Clarence had been nearly a year in his grave, and we hoped soon to see his pretty crib tenanted again by one who would be as dear and beautiful as himself. Oh, how my Clarence watched over his wife! with such tender anxiety, such loving care; he would not have suffered the winds of heaven to blow too roughly upon her if it had been in his power to prevent them; and she clung to him with a sweet, confiding affection, that was beautiful to see. We were all anxious about her, though she seemed to feel well, and always said she was so.

“Mrs. Craven recommended a nurse; and, as the time drew

near, she came herself, and took up her abode with us, saying she was far too anxious to stay away; and, though it was rather inconvenient to be absent from her own house just at that time, she felt that she must be with her darling niece, and doing all she could for her comfort.

“I could see that both Nina and Clarence would have been better satisfied if she had remained in her own home, and left them to the sole enjoyment of each other’s society; but they were much too kind and polite to hint any such thing: so she stayed.

“It still wanted a week or more of the time when Nina looked for her trial, when Clarence was suddenly summoned to the city on some very urgent and important business. He was very loth to go, though he would be absent but one night; but Nina insisted, laughing at his fears, and promising to take excellent care of herself, and at last he went.

“I saw them part; it seemed as if he could not tear himself away. He held her in his arms and clasped her to his breast, kissing her over and over, till at length she pushed him playfully away, saying, with her sweet, merry laugh, ‘There, that will do, dear. Why, one would think we were parting for life!’

“‘Oh, no, dearest; don’t say that, even in jest,’ he answered, in a half-tremulous tone; and with another caress, he let her go, sprang into the carriage and drove away.”

Mrs. Barron paused for an instant, overcome by her feelings; then looking at her listener, said, “Dear child, you are her very image. No wonder, then, that he loves to look at you; for, after that parting, he saw her but once more in life, and that only for a moment, and after the power of speech was gone. He had not been gone an hour when she was laid upon what proved to be her death-bed.”

“Oh, how was it? what caused it?” asked her namesake, deeply moved.

“We were sitting together in her boudoir,” said the old lady, “she and I, both busied with some pretty work for the

expected stranger, when Mrs. Craven came in, bringing a couple of tumblers of iced lemonade on a little silver waiter. One she handed to Nina, the other to me. I drained mine to the bottom, and Nina also drank freely ; for the weather was very warm, and the cold drink was refreshing ; though I remember noticing that mine had a peculiar taste, slight, but quite perceptible.

“ However, I drank it without any remark, and handed the tumbler back, Nina doing the same ; and Mrs. Craven was carrying away the salver, declining Nina’s invitation to stay and let a servant be called to remove it, when a boy came running up the hill and across the lawn, shouting out something at the top of his voice.

“ Nina started to her feet, pale and trembling.

“ ‘ What is it ? what is it ? ’ she asked ; ‘ does he say some one has been thrown from a carriage ? ’

“ Then Mrs. Craven came rushing back, crying out ‘ He’s killed ! Clarence — ’

“ I sprang forward and put my hand over her mouth ; but it was too late. Nina had heard, and fallen down in strong convulsions.

“ A scene of dreadful confusion followed, of which I have no distinct recollection ; for hardly had we got Nina on the bed, when I was overpowered by such a deathly sickness that I had to be carried from the room, and knew nothing more until next day, when I learned that Nina had given birth to a little girl, who lived only a few minutes ; that the report of the accident had proved a false alarm ; that Clarence had been telegraphed for, and had returned just in time for his wife to breathe her last in his arms.”

“ That woman killed her ! the wicked, wicked wretch ! I know she did ! ” cried Nina, starting up in the bed, greatly excited.

“ Oh, child, I must stop ; I fear I am doing you a mischief ! ” exclaimed Aunt Lettice ; “ your eyes are sparkling and your cheeks glowing, till you look the picture of what she

was in health, as you have been of what sickness and sorrow made her."

"Do I? Oh, I'm so glad! But don't stop, please don't; you must be nearly done."

"Yes, I am; there is but little more to tell. Clarence's grief and despair were terrible to behold; for his beautiful wife was his idol, and the little babe would have been an inestimable treasure had it lived; and to lose both at one blow seemed almost more than he could endure; so that for a time I feared for his reason, and even for his life; yet both were mercifully spared, and he came out of the ordeal a better and more useful, though a graver and sadder man.

"He did not shut himself up and nurse his grief in solitude, as I feared he would, but has, ever since the first shock was over, devoted all his energies to doing good to the souls and bodies of his fellow-creatures.

"We left Avonmore within a few weeks after the funeral—it, with all the rest of Mr. Delacourt's property, passing into Mrs. Craven's hands; for of course the law recognized her as the nearest living heir, now that both Nina and her children were dead. We came directly to Wald, and Clarence at once devoted himself to the study of medicine, working at it almost day and night; soon graduated with honor, and has ever since been a busy practitioner, especially among the poor, whom he attends gratis; he is wealthy, and does not care for making money. He is much sought after by the rich, too,—for he is very successful,—and he charges them, devoting what he makes in that way to the relief of his needy patients. He has never ceased to mourn his heavy loss, but it was made the means of his conversion; and, as a Christian, he is resigned, patient, cheerful, and even happy, in spite of his great sorrow."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## A GENEROUS OFFER.

AUNT LETTICE'S story had been too exciting for her listener, who found herself quite exhausted at its conclusion.

The old lady perceived it with regret. "I have talked too long," she said, remorsefully. "Try to rest yourself with a nap now, dear."

Nina obeyed submissively, closed her eyes, and, the room being very quiet, soon fell into a deep sleep, which lasted several hours.

On awaking, her thoughts at once reverted to the subject that had occupied them last. Mrs. Barron had spoken in her concluding sentence of Dr. Monteith's character as a Christian; a name which, to Nina, was intimately associated with Mrs. Powell, who so constantly spoke of herself as a pattern Christian, yet at the same time showed, in her daily life, a spirit so utterly opposed to that of true Christianity that she had aroused in the heart of the young girl a feeling of bitter scorn and contempt for all who made a like profession. For alas! in her blindness and ignorance, Nina had mistaken the worthless counterfeit for the true gold, and set a correspondingly low estimate upon the latter. Dr. Monteith's disinterested kindness had won her heart; but now she said to herself, "If he is a Christian, he is doubtless like Mrs. Powell, — strict and stern; harsh in his judgment of others, and always ready to hold himself up as a pattern to them. He has not shown himself so to me yet, it is true; but that, I presume, has only been because of my illness, and as soon as I am able to be up and about, it will all be different. Oh, how I hate Christians! how I wish he was not one!"



Then upon these thoughts followed the others that had been so sorely troubling her for days past; thoughts of her own forlorn condition, and the perplexing questions, when, where and how she should find a way to earn her bread; and so she grew very restless, very sad and sorrowful. And thus the doctor found her on coming in to pay his evening visit.

He felt her pulse, looked at the flushed cheeks and troubled, anxious countenance, and said, in a grave, slightly reproving tone, "My patients cannot reasonably expect to get well, while they refuse to take my prescriptions."

Tears filled her eyes at the rebuke, and she said, humbly, "I did not know that I had neglected any of them. I have taken all the medicine you left me."

"Not quite, daughter," he answered, in tones so gentle and tender that they thrilled her heart with joy and love; "for if I read your symptoms aright, you are again thinking of yourself as homeless and friendless, and growing sad and weary and troubled over the perplexing question where you are to find a roof to cover your head; and did I not offer you mine?"

"Yes; you were so very kind," she said, deeply blushing; "but — but it was before I told you that — that I do not know who or what I am."

Her voice choked, and the last words were scarcely audible.

"Nina, darling," he said, leaning over her, "I care nothing for that, except that it increases the tender pity I have felt for you ever since my eyes first rested upon your sweet face yonder in the wood. Do you know that you are wonderfully like to my precious wife, who has gone before me to the better land? and that you bear the same name, and are just the age, I should judge, that my darling daughter, buried in the same grave with her mother, would now be, if she were living? My heart has been strangely drawn to you from the first," he went on, without waiting for any reply to his questions, "with just such a true, tender, yearning affection as I have ever felt for my own children, early taken

away from me by death. My little ones are not lost, but only gone before; yet, as regards this life, I am childless. And you are fatherless; shall we not give ourselves to each other? Will you accept me for your father, and become to me a dearly loved and tenderly cherished daughter?"

An expression of intense, joyful surprise passed over her features, but was gone again in an instant; her cheek flushed and paled, and tears forced themselves from beneath the quivering lashes, and rolled quickly down her face.

"Oh don't, don't think me ungrateful for all your great kindness," she said, with a low sob; "but how can I consent to be entirely dependent on one upon whom I have not the slightest claim of relationship? I don't know how to thank you for such an offer—so astonishingly generous; but I—I cannot accept it. I have been taunted once with living on those who were not related to me, and I have vowed that henceforth my own hands shall earn my living."

He turned away with a sigh, that went like a stab to her heart; it seemed to tell of the death of a hope so fondly cherished, so unwillingly resigned.

Nina's heart smote her, as she heard him pacing sadly to and fro, and conscience accused her of base ingratitude to one who had treated her with most generous and undeserved kindness. She could not but repent that she had wounded him; yet hers was not a nature readily to yield, or reverse its decisions, and she lay silently listening to the steady footfalls, shedding some bitter tears, yet making no sign that she relented.

At length he returned to the bedside, and leaning over her, softly kissed her forehead. "Don't cry, my daughter," he said, very low and tenderly; "I do not blame you that you cannot return my affection—"

"Oh, it is not that, indeed, indeed, it is not that!" she cried, impetuously; "you have been *so very good, so kind* to me—"

"Ah, but it is not gratitude I want, dear child, but filial

love," he said, interrupting her in his turn; "yet do not be disturbed that you are not able to give it; try to keep quiet, and to listen to me, for I would, if possible, relieve you of all anxiety of mind, that you may the more speedily recover your health and strength.

"Though not willing to become my daughter, you can, if you choose, remain under my roof in some other capacity, — as Aunt Lettice's companion and assistant, or my little hand-maiden, to bring me my slippers, read the papers to me when I am tired, copy my letters, etc., etc. Or, if you would like to fit yourself for teaching, and are not too proud to accept assistance from me, I will gladly help you to the necessary education; for I cannot suppose that, at your age, such preparation has already been made."

She shook her head, but tried in vain to command her voice to speak.

"You need not try to decide upon anything now," he said kindly, passing his hand caressingly over her hair as he spoke. "I only want you to rest satisfied that your way is made easy, so far as you will let it be made so by one who has wealth and influence at his command, and who will take pleasure in assisting you."

"Oh, how *good, how good* you are to me!" she sobbed, catching his hand and pressing it to her lips.

His lip trembled, and he moved away, but came to her side again in a moment.

"I would have you understand, dear one, that I have not withdrawn my first offer; that it is still open to your acceptance," he said, with a yearning look into the beautiful eyes, so like to those which had been wont to gaze so lovingly into his. "I will not urge it; but lest you are rejecting it under a false impression, that all the giving would be mine, all the receiving yours, I must say a few words more. Fifteen years ago, God gave me a daughter, but within an hour death snatched her from me; robbing me, on the same day, of my idolized wife.

“I shall never marry again; and now I stand almost alone in the world, with none to inherit my wealth, no son or daughter to be the prop and stay of my declining years, or to make my home bright and cheerful by their presence, my heart glad with their filial affection. And when I look upon you, and see you so entirely what my own darling might have been had she lived, I feel that, could you find it in your heart to give yourself to me, rendering to me the love, honor, and obedience of a daughter, I would prize the gift more than tongue can tell; consider it far more than an equivalent for all that my wealth can enable me to do for you; yet hope that a father’s love, guidance, and protection might seem to you something like an adequate return.

“Taking this view of the case, you will see that neither need feel under any painful weight of obligation to the other. Yet mutual love needs not to balance accounts.

“I do not ask for your final decision now,” he added, taking her hand in his and laying his finger on her pulse; “you have had too much excitement to-night, and we will put this matter all aside for the present; you shall take your own time to consider it, and to become better acquainted with me: I will wait days or weeks, if you wish. And now good-night.”

He pressed his lips to her cheek, then laid his hand on her head. “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and give thee peace.”

The tender, grave, half-tremulous tones, and the sweet and holy words lingered in her memory, repeating themselves again and again, with a strangely soothing power, as sleep softly stole over her senses, and locked them in its kind embrace.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## NINA'S CHOICE.

NINA slept beyond her usual hour the next morning. Her slumbers were broken at last by sweet sounds floating in upon the summer breeze ; and listening for a moment she was able to distinguish several fine voices, male and female, uniting in a morning hymn of praise, and blending harmoniously with the tones of an organ, played by a not unskilful hand.

She lay listening with rapt attention while two or three verses were sung, then, as the last strain died away and all was quiet, "They are at family worship," she said to herself ; "that much sounded pleasant enough from a distance ; but the rest I suppose is about like Uncle Powell's,—a dull chapter in the Bible, followed by a duller prayer that seems interminably long. No, I have had enough of such things,—enough of religion, enough of living with people who are so good and pious that they scorn and despise me for my wickedness. Dr. Monteith is very good, and when he knows me better, he will think as ill of me as Aunt — no, Mrs. Powell did ; and he would, no doubt, be very strict and exacting, — he did not forget to mention obedience last night,—and I love liberty. No, I can't give myself to him, though I do love him dearly ; at least I would, if he were not a Christian ; the thought of that almost makes me positively dislike him.

"And Aunt Lettice is one too ; oh, no, no, I could not endure it ! Ah, if I could only find such people again as dear papa and mamma, — for I *will* call them so still, — not Christians, but oh, so kind and good !"

Tears gathered in her eyes and trickled slowly down her cheeks, as memory sadly recalled scene after scene of her

childhood's days and brought vividly before her the faces and forms of the loved and lost.

"Tears again, my poor child? Can I do nothing to make you happy?" asked a kind voice at her side; and she looked up into Dr. Monteith's face as he bent over her in grave and sorrowful sympathy.

She had not heard his approach, for his slippered feet made no noise on the soft velvet carpet, and she had been too much taken up with her own sad thoughts to notice his entrance.

"Forgive me; I fear I must seem very ungrateful for all your kindness," she stammered, "but my thoughts had gone back to the days of my early childhood, and the dear parents who made life so happy to me then." And the tears fell faster than before.

"It is right to remember them and their kindness," he said, gently; "and perhaps it would do you good to tell me about them. Nothing would interest me more," he added, taking a seat by the bedside.

He saw that her heart was full to overflowing, and rightly judged that it would be a relief to pour out the whole sad story into the ear of a sympathizing listener. He took her hand in his, gently pressing and stroking it, while amid mingled sobs, tears, and smiles she told her simple tale of childish joys and sorrows, and the homely toils and pleasures of life in a New England farm-house, — life made bright and joyous to her by a father's proud, fond affection, and a mother's love and care.

She read earnest, tender sympathy in his eyes, and felt that he was fast winning the love he had asked for; yet, when in reply to the glowing picture she had drawn of Mrs. Clemens, he remarked, "She must have been indeed a lovely character," she averted her face, saying in a bitter tone, "*You* would not have thought so; for she made no pretensions to Christianity."

Her tone pained, while her words greatly surprised him.

"Why do you judge so, my child?" he asked.

“Because I know what Christians are; and that they can see nothing lovely, nothing to admire, in those who are not of their number. Mrs. Powell told me every day what a good Christian she was, — quite a pattern to others; but, though mamma was her own sister, and so sweet and dear that everybody loved her, she could see no good in her, because she was not a Christian.”

“I think you mistake, my child, in saying you know what Christians are,” he answered, in his accustomed kindly tone; “a true Christian does not think highly of himself, does not consider himself a pattern to others; but is meek and lowly, like his Master. But, alas! not all who call themselves by the name are true disciples of Christ; and hypocrites and self-deceivers bring great reproach upon his cause.

“You are strangely mistaken, too, in thinking that I can see nothing to admire in any who are not, or do not profess to be, Christians; for I have met with some whose natural characters were so lovely, that it was impossible to help respecting and loving them too. But you must have your breakfast now, and we will speak further of this at another time.”

“You are not angry?” she said, with a wistful, inquiring look. “I fear I have spoken as I ought not; and you are so, so kind to me.”

“No, dear child; it would take much more to make me angry with you,” he answered, tenderly.

Aunt Lettice, also, had been a deeply-interested listener to Nina’s story; and later in the day, when they were alone together, and the young girl seemed inclined to talk, she drew her on by one question after another to speak again of the past, and to describe to her the inmates of both her former homes. And Nina complied, without being aware how plainly she showed to Mrs. Barron the bitter hatred to religion, and to the very name of Christian, which she had imbibed through judging of it by the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Powell, particularly the latter.

Aunt Lettice sighed secretly and pityingly over the error

of the poor, mistaken child,—blaming, not her, but those who, by their hypocrisy and spiritual pride, had done her so great an injury,—but thought it not best to notice or combat it at that time.

“Ah, let her but remain for a few months, or even weeks, in this house, and watch my Clarence’s life, and she will need no further proof that *true* Christianity is lovely, and much to be desired,” she said to herself; never thinking, in her sweet humility and lowliness of mind, that, to a close observer, the sight of her own life would bring just as strong conviction.

But at length reading in Nina’s words and looks her fear with regard to Dr. Monteith, the dear old lady could no longer keep silence,

“My child,” she said, in her sweet, gentle way, “let me tell you what Christianity has done for him. I always thought him a noble character, but religion has improved him greatly. He is naturally very impulsive, and of a quick, fiery temper; but religion has taught him almost perfect self-control. Formerly, natural generosity led him to give freely of his substance to the poor and needy who came in his way; now, the love of Christ constrains him to search out the sick, the sorrowing, the poor and distressed, and devote to their relief, not money only, but time and labor, sympathy and prayer besides. The Master, when on earth, went about doing good, and I can truly say that my Clarence follows closely in His footsteps.”

Nina looked thoughtful. “Is he then perfect?” she asked.

“Oh, no, child,” replied Aunt Lettice, quickly; “and he would be the last to think so. He has yet the remains of the old nature clinging to him; but it is his grief and burden; and though to us he seems to run with great patience and diligence in the upward and onward path, he himself thinks he walks but slowly and unsteadily therein, and with many slips and falls.”

Here the subject was dropped for the time; but it dwelt



much in Nina's thoughts; and she watched Dr. Monteith narrowly, while constantly debating in her own mind whether or not she should accept him as her father.

He, in the meantime, kept faithfully to his promise not to urge her, or hurry her decision; though the yearning of his heart could be read in his fine, expressive eyes.

But Aunt Lettice had given no such pledge, and at length she could no longer refrain from speaking.

"I cannot but wonder, my dear," she said, as Dr. Monteith left them one morning, after paying his accustomed professional visit to Nina, "how you can close your heart against my Clarence—so dear, so kind, so noble as he is: what other friendless orphan would hesitate for a single moment to accept such an offer as he has made to you?"

"Dear, kind Aunt Lettice, I know I must seem to you strangely ungrateful," replied Nina, with emotion; "for indeed the truth is I seem so to myself; but I have a very strong love of liberty,—after five years of weary bondage, it is doubly sweet;—and I am loath to resign it: and you know that Dr. Monteith expressly stipulated obedience to him as among the terms on which he would take me to be his daughter."

"And you fear his loving, wise control?" cried the old lady, surprised and almost indignant. "Child! child! do you think you are wise enough to guide yourself? And have you not told me that your mother, who controlled you, was dearer to you than your over-indulgent father?"

"True," replied Nina, thoughtfully; "I had forgotten that fact. But I was such a child then," she added, after a moment, "and now I am almost a woman."

A half smile flitted over the kindly face of the old lady; then a grave look settled down upon it, and glancing affectionately at Nina, "My dear child," she said, in a serious tone, "you never needed guidance and control more than you do now; and I know not where you could find a wiser, more judicious, or kinder guardian than my Clarence. I

think he could hardly love you better if you were really his own flesh and blood ; and, as he says himself, the yearning of his heart over you, united to your wonderful resemblance to his wife, would almost convince him against his reason,— which says it is impossible it could be so, — that you must be indeed his own child.”

An expression of exquisite joy lighted up Nina’s features for a moment, but was quickly succeeded by one of doubt and almost of dread.

“What is it you fear, my child?” asked Aunt Lettice, observing her narrowly.

“He would be very strict, would he not? he would never put up with the slightest disobedience to his orders?”

“No, that he would not ; he will be master in his own house. But I could not respect him if he were not. Could you, my dear?”

“No, ma’am, I own I could n’t,” replied Nina, slowly, Mr. Powell’s meek bearing in the presence of his wife recurring to her recollection, and bringing with it the old feeling of contempt and disgust. “But,” she added, in the old bitter tone, and turning away her face as she spoke, “I have been long enough under *Christian* rule, and I’m tired of it.”

Gentle and kindly as was Aunt Lettice’s nature, her indignation was roused at that, so unjust it seemed to him who was as the apple of her eye. “If you think, Nina, that my Clarence is such an one as you have described to me in that Mrs. Powell,” she said, with some spirit, “I must tell you you were never more mistaken ; he is a Christian of quite another stamp, having the ring of the true metal, while she is but a base counterfeit. Alas, my poor child, how much harm that woman has done you!” she added, in her own kindly tone, and with a pitying sigh.

Nina gave a sudden start, blushed, and trembled slightly ; for at that moment Dr. Monteith’s step was heard in the hall, and the next instant he looked in at the door.

“I am going to take our little girl out for a short drive,

Aunt Lettice," he said, "if you will be so kind as to get her ready."

Nina looked up in dismay. "It takes so long to comb out my hair, you know, Aunt Lettice," she whispered; "and I should be terribly frightened to think that I was keeping him waiting. And besides, I cannot go in a night-gown."

"I'm afraid we would have to keep you waiting, Clarence," replied his aunt, turning toward him; "she is too weak yet to be hurried through her dressing."

"She must go," he answered, with a smile; "doctors are autocrats, you know, — especially in their own houses. But she shall not be made nervous with the idea that she is detaining me. I will visit some other patients, and return in an hour and a half; that will give her time for the dressing, — which, of course, must not be at all elaborate, — and a rest after it."

"There, my dear, is a specimen of the tyranny you are dreading," remarked the old lady, with an arch smile, as he closed the door, and they heard his quick, firm step passing down the hall again.

"He is very kind," said Nina, averting her face, while a quick, vivid blush mantled her cheek.

"Yes, he will be obeyed," said Aunt Lettice, more as if thinking aloud than speaking to her charge; "but his rule is always so reasonable, so wise, and kind, that it only adds to the happiness of the governed." She was collecting the materials for Nina's toilette, and assisting her to move from the bed to an easy-chair placed near it.

"What a beautiful head of hair you have," she remarked, combing it out with tender carefulness; "just like hers — so soft and fine and glossy, and yet so abundant; which last is very unusual in black hair, unless it is coarse and harsh; and then it curls so prettily, and is so long, too; and hers was just the same. How proud he always was of it! how often I have seen him twining her beautiful ringlets round his fingers, and kissing them, too, when he thought no one saw him.

Ah, she was his idol, true enough, and no other will ever fill her place; though you, I suppose, might, if you would, almost fill that of the little daughter he lost."

Nina listened in silence, though secretly rejoicing very much that she bore so many points of resemblance to Dr. Monteith's beautiful wife. But when the arrangement of her hair was completed, and Mrs. Barron, going to a wardrobe at the farther side of the room, brought out a pair of silk stockings, and tiny embroidered satin slippers, and an elegant morning-dress of pale blue silk, she looked up in amazement, saying, "They cannot be for me?"

"They were *hers*," sighed the old lady, with tears trembling in her eyes, as she stooped and took one of Nina's small white feet in her hands; "he told me to dress you in them; and he must love you very dearly, or he never could have been willing to see them on you. No one has ever worn anything of hers before."

"How good, oh, how good in him! And how you are waiting on me, dear Aunt Lettice," said Nina, almost ready to cry, as the gentle, dignified old lady seated herself on a stool before her chair and proceeded to dress her feet; "it is not fit you should; I ought rather to wait upon you."

"When you grow well and strong you shall," and the soft, white hands were passed caressingly over the tiny, slipped foot. "These seem to fit almost as well as if they had been made for you. I might call Rose to dress you,—she has quite a talent for the duties of a lady's maid,—but it is my pleasure to wait on you myself, now while you are weak and ill."

The doctor found his patient quite ready for him on his return. He noticed her elegant and tasteful attire with a pleased but half-sorrowful smile, and, lifting her in his arms, he bore her to the carriage. Placing her in it, he seated himself by her side, and supported her with tender care during the short drive about the grounds, which he deemed sufficient for her slender strength to endure; talking to her

the while in a cheerful strain, that doubled the enjoyment of the ride in the pure, sweet air.

"It has been *so* nice, and you are so *very* kind," she murmured, as he laid her on her bed again.

"Am I?" he said, looking at her with a smile and a sigh. He half opened his lips to say something more, then closed them, and moved away without another word.

"Oh, how good he is to me now; I wish I could be sure —" murmured Nina to herself, dropping off to sleep ere her sentence was finished.

The dinner-bell woke her, to find her protector leaning over her, with that look of intense, yearning, fatherly affection in his eyes which always went straight to her heart.

"I am going to have you dine with us, if you feel equal to the exertion," he said, caressing her, and smiling fondly upon her.

"Oh, I should like it," she answered, eagerly. "I am quite rested; I have not felt so strong since — since I was taken ill."

"You are looking very bright," he said, taking her in his arms again: "I hope soon to see you quite well. And now I must introduce you to Marchant de Vere, my ward, who has been longing to make your acquaintance," he added, as he bore her into the dining-room, and seated her in an arm-chair before a well-spread table. "Here she is, Marchant."

A fine, handsome young fellow of eighteen, or thereabouts, stepped forward, and held out his hand, saying, in a kindly tone, "How d'ye do, miss? I am very glad you are recovering," accompanying the words with a look of intense, surprised admiration there was no mistaking, and which brought the rich blood to Nina's fair cheek, enhancing her beauty greatly.

"Thank you," she said, simply, placing her hand in his for an instant.

The touch sent a thrill through the boy's whole frame, and during the meal he seemed scarcely able to take his eyes from

the beautiful face, which was placed directly opposite him, and at the doctor's right hand.

Nina had been so accustomed to admiration, even from her very infancy, that it seldom disturbed her; but now, with nerves weakened by illness, she found it somewhat embarrassing.

Her disturbance did not escape the doctor's keen eye; and he exerted himself, with some success, for her relief, and carried her away again as soon as she had finished her meal.

Then returning to the dining-room, where the others still lingered at the table, "Marchant," he said, laying a hand on the lad's shoulder, and looking down at him with a very grave countenance, but with a twinkle in his eye, "I had no idea you could be so rude. Why, you fairly stared my little girl out of countenance!"

"Uncle!" cried the boy, in a burst of enthusiastic admiration, "I could n't help it! I actually could n't help it! Why, she's the loveliest creature I ever saw!"

"So she is," said the doctor, resuming his seat: "I never saw any but one face at all to be compared to it." And he lifted his eyes with an expression of deep tenderness, mingled with sorrowful resignation, to a life-sized portrait of a most beautiful woman which hung on the opposite wall.

Marchant's eyes followed the direction of his gaze.

"How like they are! It is perfectly wonderful!" he exclaimed. "I cannot see any difference; except that my aunt, I suppose, must have been five or six years older when that was taken."

"Yes; she was about twenty," said the doctor, with another glance of tenderest affection at the portrait, and a slight sigh as he dropped his eyes upon his plate again.

"Does she resemble Aunt Nina in anything besides looks?" asked Marchant, with keen interest.

"Her voice," answered Dr. Monteith, with emotion: "its tones seem the very same. Is it not so, Aunt Lettice?"

"Yes; it has fairly startled me at times."

“I think she differs more in character than in anything else,” continued the doctor, musingly, leaning back in his chair, and again looking up at the portrait; “at least so far as I have yet been able to judge. I think she has more pride, more firmness, and more self-reliance than my darling, who was all gentleness; and if she were my own child, I should say she had inherited these characteristics from me. As a boy, I was both quick-tempered and obstinate, to say nothing of what I am as a man.”

Having been promised another ride, if the weather was favorable, Nina was much disappointed, on awaking the next morning, to find it raining steadily. Yet the day was not without its pleasures: first a walk about the room, supported by Dr. Monteith's strong arm; afterwards an entertaining book read to her by Aunt Lettice; and then a long, delicious sleep, followed by a second appearance at the dinner-table.

Marchant, better prepared for the vision of beauty, was on his guard to-day, and forced his eyes to take their feast more stealthily. This, and an increase of strength, set Nina quite at her ease, and left her at leisure from herself to see and hear all that was said and done. She watched Dr. Monteith closely, interested in others principally as their manner toward him, or his toward them, enabled her to get a clearer insight into his character. And her respect, reverence, and affection grew apace with all she saw and heard. It was easy to perceive that from Mrs. Barron and Marchant de Vere, down to the youngest servant, one and all regarded him with reverence and love, looking up to him as guide and counsellor, ruler and friend.

Secretly, Nina exulted in the proud consciousness that this man was not only willing, but anxious to become her parent; that he loved her tenderly as though she were indeed his own child, and longed to hear her lips call him father. She knew in her secret heart that it would be a terrible blow to her should he withdraw his generous offer; and yet, with strange perversity, she delayed day after day to speak the word that

should make his happiness and hers; though each day his tender care and thoughtfulness endeared him to her more and more.

“One thing more, and I *will* decide,” she murmured to herself, as she lay on her bed one morning about a week after her first ride, and first meal taken with the family. “I have not found him at all like Mrs. Powell yet, and indeed I am sure he is not, or he never would have told Aunt Lettice to dress me in those beautiful clothes; but I must see if he resembles Mr. Powell in one thing, that I found almost intolerable there; because I am so depraved, Mrs. Powell would say; and I suppose it may be true. But, oh dear, I wish he was n’t a Christian! If he only was n’t, it would n’t take me a minute to decide to belong to him, and obey him. I wonder if he really likes to read the Bible, and pray. I’m perfectly sure it was nothing but a penance to Mrs. Powell, with all her pretension to superior sanctity. But then here’s dear old Aunt Lettice, who, I’m just as sure, does love it; so I know they are not all alike.”

Mrs. Barron was sleeping beside her charge, who, though no longer so ill as to need any one to sit up with her, was not yet well enough to be left quite alone.

“What, awake before me?” she asked, opening her eyes and seeing Nina sitting up in the bed.

“Yes, auntie; I was just thinking whether I could n’t be my own dressing-maid, and do up my hair myself, I’m growing so much stronger.”

“Not yet, child; you are hardly equal to that yet. Lie still a little longer, and I will help you as usual. It is a pleasure to me; and, if it were not, there is Rose, who would be only too glad to be called upon to be your lady’s-maid.”

“Thank you; I will wait then,” said Nina. “I want to ask a favor of Dr. Monteith this morning,” she remarked presently afterwards; “do you think he will grant it, Aunt Lettice?”



"If it is anything reasonable, I am sure he will. But suppose you try calling him something else than Dr. Monteith," said the old lady, with a persuasive smile; "it would make it very hard for him to refuse your request."

"He has not said anything about that, lately," Nina answered, blushing, and turning away her face; "and perhaps he no longer desires it."

"My darling, it is the dearest wish of his heart. I know of nothing that would make him so happy. And he deserves it at your hands."

"He does, indeed, Aunt Lettice," replied the young girl, with emotion; "he deserves a far better daughter than I could ever be."

"He will be more than satisfied with you, if you do your best," was the smiling rejoinder.

Hitherto, Nina had taken her breakfast in bed; and of late the doctor had not paid his morning visit until after that meal was over; but to-day, waiting only till Mrs. Barron's toilette was completed, she asked to be dressed at once, and that a servant might be sent to tell the doctor she would like to speak to him before he went to his breakfast.

He came, fearing she was worse, and was agreeably surprised to find her dressed, and reclining upon the sofa. He looked greatly pleased as he drew near, and stooped to give her a fatherly caress.

"You are looking better and brighter than at any time before since you began to recover. But I heard that you wanted me. What is it? what is your request, and you shall have it, to the half of my kingdom," he said, playfully.

"Only that I may go out to breakfast with the family, if you are willing, and it will not tire you too much to carry me."

"It will not tire me; and if you feel equal to the exertion, nothing would please me better than to have you by my side," he answered, as he took her in his arms; for the bell had already rung.

Aunt Lettice preceded them to the breakfast-parlor, and Marchant, starting forward with an exclamation of pleased surprise, made haste to wheel up an easy-chair to the table, in which the doctor seated the invalid, saying, "One more step toward recovery! We shall soon have you with us altogether."

They were a very cheerful party, and Nina had never enjoyed a meal more thoroughly; her convalescent's appetite and Dinah's excellent culinary skill uniting to render the viands as agreeable to her palate as was the flow of lively, intelligent conversation to her intellect.

As they rose from the table, Dr. Monteith asked, "Shall I carry you back to your sofa now?"

"If you please, I would like to stay a little longer," she answered, smiling up at him.

He stooped over her. "We are going into the next room, to have family worship," he said, in an undertone. "If you would like to join us, and feel equal to sitting up so long, we will be glad to have you there."

"I think I am strong enough, and I should like to be present," she replied, and felt herself well rewarded by the gratified expression of his face as he took hold of her chair and wheeled it into the room he had indicated, where the rest of the family, including all the servants, had already assembled.

He placed Nina beside his aunt, then took his seat before a table, on which lay a large family Bible and a hymn-book. All were still, and there seemed a solemn hush in the room as, with reverential air, Dr. Monteith opened the Bible and, with his hand upon the page, glanced about upon the little group. "This book," he said, with sweet and gentle gravity, "is the letter of our kind, loving, heavenly Father, written to each one of us to teach us His holy will, and the way in which we must walk,—the way of repentance and faith in Christ,—if we would reach that happy home He is preparing for us above. Let us listen to its teachings."

He then read a chapter in one of the Gospels, pausing now

and then to give a word of explanation; and Nina found herself listening with an interest in the teachings of that book which was quite new to her. A hymn followed the reading, Marchant playing the organ, and every one — including Nina, to whom he had handed a book — joining in the singing. As the last strain died away, all rose from their seats and knelt, while Dr. Monteith led in prayer.

How different it was from the same act of devotion performed morning and evening by Mr. Powell. His dull, monotonous tone showed his prayer to be a mere form, but this man spoke as if he were talking face to face with his Father and Friend, who loved him and whom he loved; and asking for himself, and for those about him, such things as he felt that they really needed, and that his Father was able and willing to grant. His prayer was short, earnest, and reverential, and when, near its close, he gave thanks, in tones tremulous with emotion, for the returning health of the dear one who had been so near the borders of the grave, and besought a blessing upon her which should include all temporal and all spiritual good, Nina's heart was touched, and tears flowed freely from her eyes.

She wiped them away quickly as the "Amen" was pronounced, and all rose from their knees.

Marchant walked quickly from the room, the doctor gave some directions to the servants, and, as they and Mrs. Barron went out, he turned to Nina.

"I fear that you are very weary by this time, daughter; it has been rather a long sitting up for your feeble strength," he said, drawing near her chair, and bending down to take her in his arms.

"Father," she murmured, as she clasped hers lovingly about his neck, and hid her face on his breast, "if you will take me, I will be your child."

"My darling! my precious child!" he whispered, clasping her close and closer still, with a heart almost too full for utterance. He carried her to her sofa, and laid her down

upon it; and as she looked up, she saw his face radiant with joy. "Say that word again, my darling," he entreated; "let me hear your dear voice again call me father."

"Father, dear father, how I love you!" she cried, putting her arms about his neck again, and laying her cheek to his.

"Ah, dearest one, image of my beloved wife, you do not know the happiness your words have given me," he said, caressing her again and again. "But have you fully counted the cost?" he asked, with sudden gravity, taking her hand in his and gazing wistfully into her eyes; "will you not repent of your precious gift to me? a gift I fear I can never willingly resign."

"No, dear father, I shall not repent. I have fully counted the cost, and mean to be a good, obedient daughter to you. And if I am not, you must be a good father, and punish me for my naughtiness," she added, half playfully, half in earnest, softly stroking his beard with her pretty white hand as she spoke. "I know I am not wise enough or good enough to be safe without guidance and control. Aunt Lettice told me so, and I know it is true; and you have taught me to love you so dearly that I believe it will be a pleasure to submit my will to yours."

"I'm afraid you will not always find it so, darling," he answered, gently; "it can hardly be that our wills will not sometimes come in conflict, and then, if you are my daughter, you must yield. Can you promise me that this shall be?"

"Yes," she said, putting her hand confidently into his; "I promise you all the obedience that my father has a right to demand of his daughter, and much more than many daughters give—for I know you are good and wise and kind; that is, I give you the right to *make* me be good, when I don't want to," she added, with a vivid blush, and an air of charming frankness; "for I own I'm so wilful and obstinate by nature, that I'll be pretty sure to give you trouble to rule me at times; and you ought to know it all before you undertake the care and control of me."

He smiled. "I think we will risk it," he said, touching his lips to her forehead; "henceforth we are father and child. And now, good-bye for the present. I must go to my patients, and in two hours I shall expect to find my daughter ready for her ride."

Nina followed him with eyes beaming with joy and love, as he hurried from the room, feeling that he had already lingered too long for the good of his patients.

"Ah, I knew you could not fail to learn to love him," said Aunt Lettice, joyously; for she had witnessed the greater part of the interview, and her face was radiant with delight that at last the two she loved so dearly—the *two*, for she had long since taken Nina into her very heart of hearts—were made so happy in each other.

"Oh, Aunt Lettice, I do believe I'm the happiest girl alive!" exclaimed Nina. "To think that I should have *such* a man for my father! so good, so kind, so noble! How it would astonish Mrs. Powell to hear it. But oh, I fear he will be disappointed in me," she added, anxiously. "I'm sure I want to be good; but I have a terrible temper, and it will get the better of me sometimes."

"I think he will help you to learn to conquer it, my child," said Aunt Lettice, softly smoothing her hair. "He knows you have faults, and does not expect to be always able to control you and train you aright without some trouble, some heart-ache in being obliged to cross your wishes and inclinations: yet he loves you so truly, that he will not shrink from doing whatever he sees is for your good, cost him what it will."

"Oh, I hope I shall never give him a heart-ache," cried Nina, earnestly, the tears springing to her eyes at the very thought.

Aunt Lettice kissed her. "I hope not, dear; but we all do wrong sometimes; and he will have patience with you because he feels his own weakness and proneness to err, and

knows that his God is very long-suffering and patient with him."

"I don't believe he ever does wrong!" cried the young girl, impetuously.

"Tell *him* that, and see what he will say," rejoined Aunt Lettice, smiling. "Ah, dear," she added, more gravely, and with a slight sigh, "the Bible tell us that 'there is no man that doeth good and sinneth not.'"

"I'm sure Mrs. Powell thinks *she* is very good; she has told me so hundreds of times."

"Then she is like the Pharisee, who prayed, 'God I thank thee that I am not as other men are.' But the Lord Jesus bade his disciples 'Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.' That is his verdict regarding those who think highly of their own goodness."

"She always told me she was one of the very best of Christians," pursued Nina; "and seeing how self-righteous she was, and how hardly she judged others, and all her close-dealings with the poor, and her cruelty to me, made me hate Christianity, and all who professed it; especially as mamma, who made no such profession, was so good and charitable, and so kind and sweet. But I have found out that you and—" she paused an instant, then added, with a bright blush, and eyes glistening with proud delight, "and father are Christians of a very different kind. It seems to me that you and Mrs. Powell are exact opposites: she thinking herself so good, and yet being so far from it; and you and he having so low an opinion of yourselves, while you are really and truly so very good."

"No, dear: you forget the inspired word I quoted to you but now; none of us can stand in his own righteousness, but the perfect righteousness of Christ is offered to all who will accept it; and I think you will find that the difference between these two sorts of professed Christians is, that the one tries to stand in his or her own righteousness, while the other glories only in His. The latter are the true gold,—'the precious sons of

Zion, comparable to fine gold,' is the Bible comparison,—the former only its counterfeit; and of them it is said, by the same high authority, 'Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them!'"

"But it seems to me that a real, true Christian ought to be perfectly good," remarked Nina, musingly. "But, please don't feel hurt, Aunt Lettice," she added, quickly, "for you know *I* think that you and father *are* perfect."

With what lingering fondness, what blushing hesitancy, she brought out that word "father;" and what secret delight it gave the dear old lady to hear her, and to watch her varying color, and the sweet light of exquisite happiness that shone in those beautiful eyes. She gazed on her in pleased silence for a moment, ere it occurred to her to reply to the remark.

"Yes, my dear," she said, at length, "they *ought*, it is true; for the command is, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' But man, in his fallen state, is not able to keep this command; and our only hope is in Him who has kept the law for us."

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### HAUNTED.

FOR an invalid, you have exerted yourself quite a good deal to-day, I think, daughter," said Dr. Monteith, as he carried Nina back to her couch after dinner; "getting up to breakfast, and staying through family worship, and afterwards taking a longer ride than usual,—besides the excitement of giving yourself away," he added, smiling, and patting her cheek, "must have tried your still feeble strength quite sufficiently for one day. So I lay my commands upon you to

lie quietly on your couch all the afternoon, and to go early to bed to-night. Will you obey me?"

"Yes, sir, I will. But you are not going to leave me just yet?" she said, inquiringly, holding fast to his hand and looking up persuasively into his face. "Do please sit down and talk to me a little."

"It would give me great pleasure," he answered, caressing her; "but I must hurry away, for I have been called to a distance to a patient who is very ill. Do not wait tea for me, Aunt Lettice; it is probable I may be away all night."

"Oh, come back soon!" entreated Nina.

"As soon as I can be spared by my patients."

She followed him with a look of grateful love as he left the room; then turning over on her pillow fell into a sweet sleep, from which she woke late in the afternoon feeling greatly refreshed.

"I would like to sit up awhile," she said to Mrs. Barron, who sat near by with a book in her hand; "but I must obey my father, and lie still. How sweet it is to call him that! father, my dear, dear father," she murmured to herself, a smile of intense happiness playing over her lovely features. "You don't know, Aunt Lettice, how he pets me when he takes me out in the carriage, and indeed whenever he is with me; or how sweet it is to be loved and petted, when one has been so hungry for it for five long years," she added, aloud, turning to the old lady a face that was perfectly radiant with joy and love. "I told him so this morning; and he looked so pleased, and hugged me up so tight, calling me his own darling, his precious little daughter, and ever so many more pet names. It was so sweet to hear them. Oh, it is all so different from the home I left a few weeks ago, or from anything I could have expected! It seems as if I have got Papa and Mamma Clemmens back, both in one."

"You are very happy, child," said the old lady, gently. "God has been very kind to you, and it rejoices my heart to see your innocent joy, and Clarence's, too; my dear Clarence,



who has mourned almost in solitude for so many years. I hope you will be a good daughter to him, — the sunshine of his home, and the stay and staff of his declining years."

"I know I mean to," murmured Nina, a tender dewiness gathering in her eyes.

The sun had set and daylight was fast fading from the sky, when Dr. Monteith returned. Aunt Lettice and Marchant had already supped, and Nina was in bed, after an early tea, according to orders. Mrs. Barron left her alone, on hearing the doctor's step in the hall, and went to the dining-room to see that he was made comfortable, and to pour out his tea, which she thought no one could make to suit his taste quite as well as herself.

Nina had not yet fallen asleep, but was lying with eyes wide open, — going over again in imagination all that had passed between her adopted father and herself that day, dwelling with rapturous delight upon each tender caress, each word of endearment, — when she was startled by a sudden apparition, a tall figure in black gliding noiselessly across the room, casting a dark shadow on the bed as it passed between it and the opposite window; then drawing swiftly and silently near, when it seemed, by a sudden, dexterous movement, to throw something into a tumbler of cooling drink that stood on a little stand by her side, and, facing round upon her, remained motionless with its gaze fixed full upon her face.

Her nerves were weakened by illness, and for a moment she felt paralyzed with fear, and utterly unable either to move or to cry out for help.

The figure bent over her, bringing its face so near her own that she could see the features distinctly, even in the dim, uncertain light of the fading day; the complexion was dark, the eyes were large, black, and fierce, and the whole countenance seemed distorted with malignant hate. It uttered not a sound, but its eyes gazed fixedly into hers, exerting over her that species of fascination by which a serpent sometimes lures a helpless bird to its destruction.

A horrible, waking nightmare was upon Nina; her tongue refused to do its office; and she could not withdraw her gaze from the face of her strange and most unwelcome visitor.

But Dr. Monteith's step and voice were heard in the hall without, and the spell was broken.

"Father, father, save me!" she shrieked, with a ring of mortal terror in her tones, that brought the whole family rushing to her aid; while at the first word the dark visitant gave a sudden start, and with a low, inarticulate sound, as of surprise and dismay, glided swiftly away, disappearing through a window into the grounds, just as Dr. Monteith reached the bedside, and clasped his trembling daughter in his arms.

"Oh, stop her, stop her! secure her! she would have killed me, I believe!" cried Nina, wildly. "Don't let her escape, to come again!"

"Who? who?" they all asked, looking here and there about the room in great excitement, but seeing nothing.

"A woman; a tall, dark woman, who has haunted me all my life," cried Nina, shuddering, and clinging to Dr. Monteith; "a woman with a dark face, and black eyes that looked so fierce, to-night, as if she would tear me to pieces! A woman that glides in and out, and makes no noise. She went through the window! she must be in the grounds now! Oh, run and catch her quickly!"

"Do so! make haste to secure her, Marchant, Jarvis, Adolphus! A hundred — a thousand dollars if you succeed!" exclaimed the doctor. "Haste! haste! or she will have made her escape."

But Nina's entreaties had sent them all out in hot pursuit of the fugitive, ere the first word had left his lips. And not only they, but Dinah and Rose also had joined in the chase; for, "if it was a woman," they said to each other, "they too could help to catch, and bring her to punishment, for frightening their pretty young lady half to death."

And so they all went rushing up one path and down

another, peeping under bushes and behind trees, up among the branches also, and down in the tall grass in the meadow ; some going in this direction, some in that, till they had thoroughly scoured the premises.

But not a trace of the mysterious woman could they find. Nor was this very strange, considering that she had had the start of even the foremost of them, and that, in the semi-darkness, her sable garments rendered her invisible at a very short distance.

While this was going on out-of-doors, Dr. Monteith and Aunt Lettice, in the house, were doing their best to soothe and comfort Nina. The two had exchanged glances of surprise and intelligence as she gave her brief, rapid sketch of her visitor.

“Do not tremble so, my darling,” he said, fondly caressing her ; “she will not return ; or if she does, she will find us prepared for her. But,” he added, as if struck by a sudden thought, “are you quite sure that you were not asleep, and dreaming ?”

“Quite, quite sure,” she answered, clinging convulsively to him. “I had not been asleep at all, but was lying wide awake, thinking, when she suddenly passed between me and the light, gliding along without making the least noise.”

A shudder shook her whole frame. “I don’t know why I am so frightened,” she said ; “I believe it is the first time I was ever thoroughly scared. I always have been called brave, but I’m afraid I’m a sad coward, after all.”

“Debility is the great cause ; illness has weakened your nerves, and they have evidently had a great shock. Here, let me give you a drink,” and he took the tumbler from the stand and held it to her lips.

But she pushed it away with a gesture of horror. “It is poisoned !” she cried. “I saw her put something into it !”

He turned pale, and set it down, saying, “This is worse than I could have imagined ! Why should any one wish to do so dreadful a deed ?”

He looked at Mrs. Barron, who, for a moment, seemed aghast at this new revelation, then brightening, said, "Oh, surely you must have been dreaming, darling; for what motive could any person have for poisoning you?"

"I don't know, Aunt Lettice; but I am perfectly sure that I was wide awake. And it is n't the first time I have seen that woman, though she never before looked at me with such hate in her eyes."

"When and where?" asked Dr. Monteith, with a tremble in his voice.

"Two or three times when I lived in my old home at Oakdale. One evening she came to the gate to speak to me as I was at play in the garden before the house, asking my name, and if I lived there; and twice afterwards she met me on the road, but only looked at me with her piercing black eyes, and passed on without speaking; and again, years afterwards, she met me in the street, in Philadelphia, and asked the same old questions,—what was my name, and where I lived,—and when I asked her why she cared, she said I looked strangely like an old friend of hers."

"And you recognized her as the same woman you had seen at Oakdale?"

"Not at first; I only thought her face was familiar,—I did n't quite see it either, because she kept her veil down; and afterwards it seemed to come to me that she must be the same."

There was agitation in the look the doctor gave his aunt, and in the tones of his voice as he said, "We must not allow this child to be left alone again; nor shall she remain below stairs to-night. Where is Dinah? Please send her or Rose to prepare the suite of rooms between yours and mine, and I will carry her up there at once. And please, Aunt Lettice, set that tumbler away; I must analyze its contents."

Dinah and Rose appeared at that moment, announcing the failure of the search,—though the others continued it some time longer,—and receiving their orders, speedily made

ready a room in the second story; when the doctor at once carried Nina thither, and, placing her in bed, administered an anodyne, and left her under Rose's guardianship; with strict orders to both to observe perfect silence, and to Nina to go to sleep as soon as possible.

Neither thought of disobeying. Nina was too weary and exhausted to feel any temptation to do so,—her unwonted excitement having given place to languor,—and Rose, though burning with curiosity to hear the whole story of her young lady's strange adventure, would as soon have thought of putting her hand into the fire, as of going contrary to Dr. Monteith's commands.

"There is some strange mystery in all this, Aunt Lettice," he said, as they left the room together; for she too had gone up to see that nothing was neglected that could add to her darling's comfort. "I know of but one woman that would answer to her description; and I perceived that the same thought occurred to you, as Nina spoke."

"Yes," she answered, with trembling eagerness; "and if it *is* she—O Clarence, it is almost as unaccountable as the wonderful resemblance, on any other supposition than that the child is really yours and Nina's; and yet—"

She paused, looking earnestly at him as they stood together beneath the lamp in the lower hall.

He was pale and agitated. "Oh, if it were—if it *could* be true! But why say that, when we know it to be as impossible as that the grave should give up its dead?"

"It does seem so," said Mrs. Barron, slowly; "and yet, why—why should *she*, she of all people, take this strange, unfriendly interest in this child? this child who is the living image of our Nina."

"I cannot explain it even to myself; I cannot understand it," he said, turning away with a groan. "And yet," he added quickly, "we do not know that it is she; there may be many other women who would answer the description. I

suppose we must set it down as a singular coincidence, and nothing more."

"Uncle," said Marchant, hurrying in from the lawn, "we have made thorough search, but without finding any intruders, and I am tempted to suspect our young friend was dreaming; though Adolphus asserts that there were a couple of suspicious-looking fellows lounging about this afternoon."

"Indeed," said the doctor. "Well, the analysis of the contents of that tumbler will prove whether the child was dreaming, and may perhaps throw some light upon the presence here of those suspicious characters."

He walked into his office as he spoke, and Marchant, following, asked, with eager curiosity, what he meant.

The doctor told him briefly, and proceeded at once to the examination, Aunt Lettice having placed the tumbler in readiness upon his office-table. It was proved to contain a powerful opiate; and the two gentlemen immediately came to the conclusion that the woman's object must have been, not to murder Nina, but to carry her off.

"Some one evidently wishes to rob me of my new-found treasure," said the doctor, with emotion. "I must guard her carefully. And you will help me, Marchant, while you are at home?"

"That I will, uncle; what manly heart but would take pride and pleasure in being called upon to assist in protecting so much beauty and innocence! I wish I could have caught that woman! What do you suppose could have been her motive for such conduct? What is she to this beautiful girl whom you have adopted?"

"I do not know, Marchant. Nina herself has not the remotest idea; though she says the woman has haunted her all her life."

He was silent for a moment, leaning his head thoughtfully upon his hand; then turning to his young companion, "I have told you nothing of Nina's history," he said, "and you have respected my silence, and asked no questions; but per-

haps it is only just and right that you, as a member of my family, and one who will be so constantly thrown into her society, should know something of it. Up to a few days previous to her coming among us, Nina had always believed herself the child of a worthy couple with whom she passed the first ten years of her life, petted, caressed, and indulged, as only children are apt to be by fond parents. They were respectable New England farmers. They died within a few weeks of each other. Nina was left to the care of a sister of her adopted mother, who proved to be anything but a kind and judicious guardian; and at length, in a fit of anger, disclosed to the child the fact that she was in reality a foundling, left, by some unknown person, at the door of those she had believed to be her parents. And, in proof of her assertion, she showed Nina a note, which she said was found pinned to the clothing of the babe."

"What was in it?" asked Marchant, with eager curiosity; "did it give no clue to her true parentage?"

"It merely stated that the child was born in wedlock, and that the parents were not poor; but, for some unexplained reason, did not wish to keep their child, and would never claim it."

"A likely story," exclaimed the boy, curling his lip with scorn; "but, of course, those who were capable of the rest of the mean business could lie also."

"Certainly," said his uncle, with a heavy sigh. "I would give much to know the whole truth in regard to her; yet it is not likely I ever shall; and if I can but keep my treasure, and make her happy as my darling daughter, I will try to be content."

There was silence between them for a little, each busy with his own thoughts; then the doctor said, suddenly, "Nina must not hear of those fellows hanging about; it would only add to her uneasiness, without doing any good. Adolphus must be warned to keep it to himself. Has he gone to bed, do you think?"

“I do not know, sir; but I will hunt him up, wherever he is, and deliver your orders,” said Marchant, rising, and looking at his watch.

“Do so, if you please,” said his uncle; “and speak to the other servants about it, too; for doubtless Adolphus has already told his story to them.”

“I will, sir. Good-night.” And Marchant hurried from the room.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### CLOUDS AND SUNLIGHT.

**N**INA awoke with a weight upon her spirits, which not all the luxury and elegance of her surroundings, or the sweet remembrance of her adopted father's fond affection,—precious, unspeakably precious, though it was to her,—could remove. Hers was so proud and sensitive a nature, that to it this mystery shrouding her birth and parentage was terrible humiliation. It had been almost forgotten for a time in the exquisite joy Dr. Monteith's tenderness and love afforded her; but the incident of the past evening had brought it back in full force; while added to it was a feeling of profound irritation and keen annoyance at finding herself still followed and watched by that strange, dark woman, whose surveillance was becoming intolerable, and apparently dangerous also.

“Who is she? and what does she know of me, or want with me?” she asked herself again and again, turning restlessly upon her pillow, and sighing wearily at the thought of the hopelessness of ever arriving at a solution of the mystery. “Oh, why was I so terrified last night?” she murmured. “Why could I not be brave enough to lay hold of her and cry out for help, keeping her there till it came?”



“What is it, dearie? did you speak to me?” asked Mrs. Barron’s pleasant voice. And laying aside the book that for the last half-hour she had been quietly reading by a window on the farther side of the room, the old lady rose and drew near to the bed.

“You have had quite a long sleep,” she said, taking the young girl’s hand in hers and softly stroking it, “and I hoped would wake refreshed. How do you feel this morning?”

“Just tolerably, thank you,” replied Nina, smiling faintly. “Is it late? is breakfast over?”

“No, dear; but I think the bell will ring in a moment. It does not matter that you are not ready, though; for your father says you are to take yours in bed. But here he comes now to give his orders in person.”

Nina’s face brightened visibly for a moment as he came forward with his tender, fatherly greeting; but the cloud soon returned. He looked at her keenly, and was not satisfied with the result of his scrutiny; yet acknowledged to himself that her depression was not greater than was reasonably to be expected. He talked to her for a few minutes in a cheerful, lively strain, promising her a drive with him as soon as she could be made ready; and then went down to his breakfast, as Rose came in bringing hers.

“Did they catch the woman, Rose?” Nina asked, as he left the room.

“No, miss; there did n’t nobody see her but you. But please don’t ask me no more questions about it; for the doctor he’s forbid us talkin’ ’bout it—’specially to you.”

“Very well; then I’ll ask *him* for all the information I want,” said Nina. And she did so as soon as she found herself alone with him in the carriage.

“There is almost nothing to tell, my dear child,” he said; “no one saw her but yourself, though the grounds were thoroughly searched, the darkness and her black dress no doubt assisting her escape. But one thing I forgot to mention to you,—that what you saw her throw into the tumbler was

merely a powerful opiate; not in sufficient quantity to kill you, but only to cause deep and prolonged sleep."

"What could she want to do that for?" exclaimed Nina, in surprise. "I cannot imagine,—unless—unless she meant to carry me off," she added, as if struck by a sudden thought, and clinging to him with a shudder as she spoke.

"Doubtless that was her object," he said, clasping her closely; "but do not fear, my darling, we are now upon our guard, and I think she will not find it possible to accomplish that or any other design she may entertain against you; so do not let apprehension of it depress your spirits, and thus retard your recovery."

"No, I do not fear her now," she said, looking up with a confiding smile. "I know you will protect me; but it makes me shudder to think what might have been my fate if she had succeeded in carrying out her designs last night."

"I am thankful indeed that she did not," he replied, and then he began conversing on pleasanter themes, exerting himself to divert her mind from the disagreeable subject, and succeeding to some extent. She grew quite cheerful, and even animated. But he perceived that she was less able to bear fatigue than she had been the day before, and soon had the horses' heads turned toward home again.

They were driving on at an easy pace. A woman, with a basket on her arm, was trudging along by the roadside, going in the opposite direction. She looked up as they passed, and Nina, catching sight of her face, started, turned pale, and clinging to her protector's arm, asked, in an agitated voice, "Did you see that woman?"

"Yes; but what of her?" he exclaimed. "Jarvis, Jarvis, stop the horses! It could not surely have been the one who—"

"Oh, no, no, sir," she interrupted, in her excitement; "she is a *very* different person; but—but this woman seems to follow me. And yet it may be nothing but a strange coincidence. When I lived with Mrs. Powell, in Philadelphia, this woman

used to sell apples, cakes, and candy near our house ; and when we moved to the country she was there directly afterwards, keeping a kind of boarding-house for the workmen in the mill ; and now she is here."

"It is certainly very singular," he said, with a grave look. "Does she seem to be an enemy? or to take any special interest in you?"

"No, sir, I can't say that she does. Mrs. Powell used to employ her occasionally to help with washing, ironing, or house-cleaning, after we went to the country ; and sometimes she seemed to feel quite indignant when she saw me ill-treated."

The woman was out of sight, and Jarvis was ordered to drive on ; while the doctor sat in thoughtful silence, supporting Nina with his arm.

"What a beautiful home you have given me, dear father. I ought to be very happy," she murmured, lifting her dewy eyes to his face, with a look of grateful affection, as they turned into the grounds of Wald, and wound about under the tall trees.

"I hope you will be, my darling," he said, with a tender, loving smile.

Mrs. Barron and Marchant came out to the door to receive them ; the latter would have assisted Nina into the house, but the doctor put him aside, and taking her in his arms, as usual, he carried her into her old room, laid her on the sofa, and, removing her hat and shawl, said, "You must take a nap now, my child, and I will leave Marchant to guard your slumbers ; for I know Aunt Lettice has some little matters to attend to."

Marchant, looking highly pleased, seated himself where he could have a full view of the face of his charge, and took a book from his pocket ; while Nina closed her eyes and fell asleep directly, having scarcely heard or understood what was said, she was so weary with her ride ; for the last night's excitement had greatly reduced her feeble strength.

Dr. Monteith motioned to his aunt to follow him, and they withdrew together to the library, where he told her of the woman they had passed on the road, and what Nina had related concerning her.

"It is very singular," she said; "and it seems all the more so, when taken in connection with something Rose has just been telling me." And she went on to tell of the visit of the berry-woman a week or two before, her strange agitation at sight of Nina, and her questions in regard to her.

The doctor listened in astonishment. "Can she be identical with either last night's visitor or the woman we met this morning, do you think?" he asked.

"I don't know. Shall I call Rose?"

"Thank you: I will ring," he said, stepping to the bell-rope and giving it a pull.

Rose answered, and on being questioned, gave a particular description of the berry-woman, naming the afternoon when she was there; and suddenly the doctor recollected having met her at the gate, and how singular her behavior had been; and then, as Rose went on to tell of the visit of the woman with her basket of "notions" an hour or so later, he recognized in her the one they had met upon the road that morning.

Still, he could neither account for their conduct, nor guess the cause of their interest in Nina; and charging Rose not to repeat what she had been telling them, and to watch that no suspicious person entered the house, he dismissed her to her work; and, turning to Mrs. Barron, said, "I can make nothing of it at all; but I see that we must guard our treasure carefully. Her spirits are much depressed to-day, and I must do something to divert her thoughts. Could you go with me to the city this afternoon, and assist me in making some purchases?"

"For her? Yes, with all my heart, if Marchant will undertake to entertain her in our absence."

"Marchant is always obliging," observed the doctor, with a slight smile. "I will order the carriage to be at the door

as we leave the dinner-table; that will not give us any too much time. And now I must hurry away to my patients."

Nina slept for two hours or more, and on awaking found Marchant still there with his book, while Mrs. Barron sat knitting by her side, and Rose was busily sewing by the window.

"You have had a good nap, and look much brighter and better for it," remarked Aunt Lettice, with a smile. "I think you will soon be able to walk a little about the house and grounds; and as the wrappers are all too long for you, I am having Rose shorten some of them. She has learned dress-making, and is very good at it; and as soon as you are able to stand the fatigue of being fitted, you are to have a quantity of new dresses made; so your father says."

"Oh, how *very* kind he is," exclaimed Nina, looking greatly pleased and interested. "I think the wrappers are perfectly beautiful. I never had anything half so pretty before."

"They are very becoming, I think," remarked Marchant, half closing his book, and looking admiringly at the graceful figure on the couch, and the fair face half hidden among the pillows.

Nina was quite free from the nonsense that fills the heads of so many girls of her age in regard to young men and boys, and was consequently fully as much at ease with Marchant as if he had been a girl. They were congenial in many of their tastes and views, and as they became better acquainted, each found the society of the other interesting and agreeable. She had always disliked Mrs. Powell's sons; but it was because of their rudeness and meanness of character, not of their sex; gentlemanly, intelligent boys she considered about as pleasant companions as girls, and she had never met one who was Marchant de Vere's superior in either respect.

They were left alone together all that afternoon, and she had never found herself better entertained. He read to her, choosing some short, lively magazine articles, and after that

they fell into a long, confidential talk, begun by Nina asking when he first came to Wald, and if it were now his only home.

“I have been here five years, but hardly know whether to say yes or no to the other question,” he answered, with a smile. “Uncle Clarence, as I call him,—we are only very distantly related, but I don’t like to remember that,—is my guardian. He considers this my home, and so do I; but there are two others equally open to me—the old homestead, now owned by my elder brother, and the house of my sister, who is well married to a wealthy gentleman farmer living in the same neighborhood.”

“The old homestead,” said Nina, “where you were born and brought up, I suppose. Oh, I should think that would always seem more homelike to you than any place else. And have n’t you some ownership in it too?”

“No; it was left to my brother; while my sister’s share and mine were in money and stocks. You see my father came from a proud old English family, and believed in having the estate always descend to the eldest son.”

Marchant was at a loss to account for the flush that rose to Nina’s cheek at his last words, and the pained expression of her face. But she was thinking, “He is of a good family, a proud, old aristocratic family, who can perhaps trace back their lineage for centuries, while I—ah, me! I do not even know who or what my own parents were.”

“My father died before I could walk, so that I retain no recollection of him whatever,” Marchant went on, anxious to divert her thoughts; “and my poor mother made such a pet of me that I was completely spoiled, and would have my own way in everything. She had been left the sole guardian of my person; but at her death, a little more than five years ago, I learned that she had left me to the guardianship of Uncle Clarence, and in a few weeks he came for me, and brought me home; and then,” he added, laughing, “I soon found that I was no longer my own master.”

Nina's interest was excited now, and she asked, in a quick way, "How was that? Is father so very stern and severe?"

"Neither the one nor the other; but he knows how to rule, and to make his subjects in love with subjection to him. I tell you, Nina, I don't believe his equal is to be found anywhere; so firm, and yet so gentle, kind, and affectionate, and so reasonable in all his requirements. I had not been a month in the house till I had learned to love him so well that I dreaded nothing so much as his displeasure, and the grieved expression of his eye when any wrong-doing of mine came to his knowledge."

Nina's eyes sparkled. "I think I have been very fortunate," she murmured, as if rather speaking to herself than to Marchant.

"Indeed you have," he answered; "any one might be proud to call him father. But you will have to obey," he added, with a smile.

"I know that; but it does not trouble me," she replied, returning the smile with one so bright and sweet, and accompanied by so charming a blush, that he thought her more beautiful than ever.

"How wonderfully like Aunt Nina you are!" he exclaimed, gazing earnestly and admiringly at her. "It does seem as though she must have been your mother. Have you noticed the portrait that hangs in the dining-room?"

"Yes; it is very beautiful. I feel it highly flattering to be told that I look like that."

"It is just what you will be five years hence," he said; "and there is one hanging in the next room which is almost precisely what you are now, — except a little more flesh and color, — for she was but seventeen when it was taken. Besides these, there is another in uncle's bedroom, taken a little over a year after her marriage, and with her first baby in her arms. It is perfectly lovely! Mr. Delacourt — her adopted father — was very wealthy, and so fond of her and so proud of her uncommon beauty, that he had her portrait taken a number of times."

“I hope I shall see them all some day; and oh, how I wish I had really been her child, and his — Dr. Monteith’s,” said Nina, sighing.

They talked on, Marchant the principal speaker; and Nina learned that he was at home now for the summer vacation, and must return to college in two or three weeks.

“In the meantime, I hope we shall become great friends,” he wound up; “for you know uncle says he wishes us to be like brother and sister to each other,—though, as you address him as father, and I as uncle, I should think we had better call ourselves cousins.”

“I think we should do exactly as father wishes,” replied Nina. “But, hark! is not that the carriage?”

“Yes; they have returned,” said Marchant, listening; “I hear their voices.”

“Well, here we are; and have not come back empty-handed, either,” said Aunt Lettice, coming in with a very smiling face, the doctor and Jarvis following with hands filled with packages of various sizes done up in brown paper.

“It looks like Christmas!” cried Marchant, jumping up and rubbing his hands. “I hope Santa Claus has not forgotten me.”

“Indeed I’m afraid he has,” said the doctor, laughing. “I’m afraid he thought of no one but Nina. Here, daughter, what do you think of this?” he asked, tearing open one of the bundles and unrolling a dress-pattern of thick rich silk, a delicate peach-blossom in color.

“Oh, it is lovely! lovely!” cried Nina, clapping her hands with delight. “But it can’t be for me?” And she looked up at him with eyes full of glad, grateful tears.

“It is for no one else,” he said, bending down to press a warm, fatherly kiss upon her forehead; “but don’t look so overwhelmed with gratitude for such a trifle, my darling,” he whispered; “it is nothing to the priceless treasure you have given me in yourself; and my daughter must be dressed suitably to her station.”



“Come, Clarence, I am as impatient as a child to see what she will think of the others,” said Aunt Lettice; and he stepped aside, while she held up to view first another dress-pattern of light silk, then a dark one, and then two of thin, gauze-like material; each and all so handsome, that a month ago Nina would have considered any one of them almost a fortune it itself.

Then followed laces, ribbons, gloves, and all the ornamental *et ceteras* of a lady’s toilette, even to an elegant and costly set of pearls, which her father placed in her hands last of all, together with another small package, which, on examination, proved to be a very handsome and well-filled *porte-monnaie*.

The child was now perfectly overwhelmed, and putting her arms around his neck, and hiding her face on his breast, she sobbed out that “it was too much; he was too good and kind and generous to her, and she did n’t deserve it at all, and never, never could.”

“There, don’t cry, darling,” he said, soothing her with the tenderest caresses; “only be a dutiful, loving little daughter to me, and I shall feel more than repaid.”

She looked up. They were quite alone; Aunt Lettice and Marchant had stolen away; and clasping her arms more closely about his neck, she returned his caresses as she had never ventured to do before; murmuring the while, “Dear, dear father! I shall be the most ungrateful wretch in existence if I am not a good, obedient, loving daughter to you.”

“A penny for your thoughts, my child,” he said, presently, as, still lying on his breast, she gazed dreamily at his pretty gifts, scattered her and there over her couch and on the table and chairs.

She started, and looked up into his face with an expression of deep reverence and love in her beautiful eyes. “I was thinking,” she said, “what a very different sort of Christian you are from Mrs. Powell. She thought me very wicked because I had a fancy for knots and bows of bright ribbon to set off my dress, and as a contrast to my black hair; and

because I liked jewelry and pretty dresses. She never bought me any that were at all expensive, or had gay colors; and mamma's watch and pin, and wedding-ring, which were left to me, she locked up where I could not get at them; and though she let me keep a little locket that had papa's and mamma's hair and likeness in it, I was forbidden ever to wear it.

"And now you have given me so many beautiful and expensive things all at once; even before I am well enough to wear them; and some of them are quite bright and gay, — that pink silk, oh, it is so lovely! it reminds me of the pretty pink blossoms that come out on the peach-trees early in the spring, and that I never tire of looking at. So I am sure you don't think gay colors are wicked!"

Her tone and look spoke inquiry, and he answered, with a smile, "How can I, my child, when our heavenly Father decks so many of his handiworks in them? Look at the roses, tulips, verbenas, dahlias, peonies, and multitudes of other flowers in our gardens, fields, and woods; think of the gorgeous coloring of the woods in autumn, of the rainbow, too, and the sunset clouds, — to say nothing of the roses that come and go on my darling's cheeks," he added, fondly, as he bent his head and pressed his lips to it for an instant. "No, I cannot think it sinful either to have a love for the beautiful, or to gratify it to a certain extent; since God himself has implanted it in us, and so abundantly provided for its gratification. Nor can I think there is more sin in the wearing of one color than another."

"I would not have you give a very large portion of your time and thoughts to dress, or exalt it above more important matters,—such as the cultivation of your mind and heart, and, above all, your duty to God and to your fellow-men;—but I would have you care enough about it to be always neatly and becomingly dressed. It is a duty we owe to those around us to make our appearance as agreeable to their eyes as possible. But no doubt I am much better able to furnish you with these things than Mrs. Powell was."

“Oh, yes, sir, I know that, and I would not think of blaming her for not providing me with *such* things!” said Nina; “but she did not dress me even decently, and told me I was very wicked because I was not willing to go to church in that old faded calico I had on when you found me.”

“That was unreasonable, I think: I would hardly blame a beggar for such unwillingness,” he replied, with some indignation in his tones.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### A GROWING FRIENDSHIP.

DR. MONTEITH'S beautiful and costly gifts had the desired effect of diverting Nina's thoughts, in a great measure, from the disagreeable subjects which were causing her anxiety and depression of spirits, and thus retarding her recovery. She feasted her eyes on the various articles of dress, counted over her money, and finding, to her astonishment and delight, that it was a hundred dollars, pleased herself with planning how she should spend it,—thinking she would ask her father's permission to send some presents to Essie, Belle, and Ned, and to poor old Peggy, too.

“Yes,” she murmured to herself; “the poor old creature shall have a nice new dress, and the warmest shawl I can find, before the cold weather comes again.” And growing forgiving in her happiness, she half resolved to remember Mr. and Mrs. Powell also with some little gifts. Nina had never before been in actual possession of so large a sum as five dollars, and a hundred seemed to her an almost inexhaustible mine of wealth.

Marchant's society, too, was of great assistance in restoring Nina's wonted cheerfulness and vivacity. He devoted himself

to her during the remainder of his vacation ; reading to her, playing and singing for her, wheeling her about the grounds in a garden-chair, or supporting her with his arm when she began to try walking a little ; in short, making himself so useful and agreeable, that the doctor laughingly said, "They could not spare him from his duties as head-nurse ; and would have to notify the college authorities not to expect him at the opening of the session."

But before the appointed day for his departure had come, Nina declared herself quite independent of nurses ; as she had now gained strength enough to go about the house, and even to take a turn in the grounds, without assistance or support. Nevertheless, she secretly wished that there was no necessity for losing Marchant's pleasant companionship, and feared that the house would seem very dull and lonely without him ; while he, on his part, had never prepared to leave Wald with so much regret. Nina grew more charming every day, as returning health added to her beauty and sprightliness, and more intimate acquaintance showed him the fine points of her character, — her noble ingenuousness, perfect freedom from conceit and affectation, and her grateful sense of the kindness of Dr. Monteith and Mrs. Barron ; her warm heart ; her keen, bright intellect and thirst for knowledge, of which, considering her limited opportunities, she had already acquired a surprising amount.

Nothing escaped her observation, — insects, stones, plants, and trees, everything attracted her attention ; and more than once or twice her inquiries sent him into the house to search his uncle's library for some book that would give the desired information.

"There never was such a girl !" he said, admiringly, to himself again and again ; "so bewitchingly beautiful, so noble in character, and at the same time so full of intellect and talent. Uncle may well call her his treasure."

It was their last day together ; Marchant was to start the next morning after an early breakfast, — too early for Nina to

appear at, Dr. Monteith had decided,—and so their good-byes must be said to-night. Marchant was undeniably melancholy, sighing audibly every now and then. Nina, too, felt depressed, but, determined not to show it, laughed and talked with more than her usual vivacity.

They were under the trees on the lawn. She was eagerly turning over the leaves of a work on the natural history of bees, which he had just brought, at her request, from the library; while he stood beside her with folded arms, gazing down admiringly at the slender, graceful figure, small, white hands, and the glowing face, half hidden by her garden-hat.

“I declare,” he exclaimed at length, “I believe you are as much like uncle in your tastes as like Aunt Nina in your looks! How you will enjoy your life here with him, sharing his studies of nature and books! He’ll give you more of his time when I am gone.”

“Will he?” she asked, looking up with an eager, joyous face. “Oh, how glad I am!”

“Yes; and you will forget all about the good times we’ve been having together, and never miss me at all,” he muttered, in an injured tone, and turning away with a petulant, half-offended air.

“Oh, no, I’ll not, Marchant; but you don’t want me to mope and fret, and make father unhappy, when he is so good and kind to me?”

“Dear me, what a selfish fellow I am!—a perfect dog in the manger!” he said, turning toward her again with a light laugh. “Nina, I don’t believe you’ve ever been in the library yet. Suppose you come now, and let me show it to you.”

“Oh, yes, I should like to,” she said, springing up and taking his offered arm.

“It opens on to the eastern balcony, and the windows, like those of nearly all the other rooms in the front building, reach to the floor; so we will pass around through the grounds, and

enter by one of them," he said, leading her on over the grass and underneath the beautiful trees, that were the glory and pride of Wald.

She uttered an exclamation of delight as they entered the library. It was a large and lofty room, lighted on the east side by the windows already mentioned, reaching from the floor almost to the ceiling, and opening upon the balcony; beyond which were long, green vistas of light and shade,— here the branches of great trees meeting overhead, there the golden sunshine lying in bright patches on the grass; and on the south by a deep bay-window, looking out upon parterres gay with flowers of every hue; and beyond these a tiny wooded, mossy dell, where a bright little stream came leaping and dancing down the declivity; the splash of its waters, as they fell into the basin below, coming pleasantly to the ear, mingled with the hum of insects and the gentle sighing of the summer breeze.

Within the room a few pieces of rare statuary, several choice paintings, a cabinet of curiosities, and multitudes of books, neatly and systematically arranged in cases along the walls, presented great attractions to Nina's eyes; while the neat and tasteful furniture, the sofas, easy-chairs, tables, and writing-desks, and the handsome carpet with its lovely shades of green and brown, enhanced the effect, and made it not only a favorable spot for mental labor, but also the most comfortable and agreeable of lounging places.

"There, I knew you would like it!" cried Marchant, seating her where she could catch the view from both the bay-window and the others. "It's my favorite resort, and uncle's, too, when the weather keeps us within doors; but at other times I prefer the shade of the trees outside."

"What are those?" asked Nina, nodding toward one of the book-cases.

"Novels; but you can't read 'em."

"I can't? Why not? I'd like to know!"

"Because they're forbidden to me, and of course they will

be to you. Uncle considers them very injurious to unformed minds, and only occasionally good for older people. He does n't trouble them very often himself. I used to read nothing else before I came here; but he cut off the supply entirely for a year or two, and now only allows me one now and then, as a rest after severe mental labor; and I must be your senior by about three years, I should think."

"Pshaw! I've always had a great love for story-books. I'm positively hungry for one of those now."

"Well, you have not been forbidden yet," he said, going to the case. "What will you have? Here are Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, Sewall, Catharine Yonge, Miss Muloch, etc., etc.; quite a host of them, all at your service."

"No, not at my service, Marchant," she answered, gravely. "I hope that will never be my way of obeying, though I don't pretend to any special goodness. Father is so kind to me, I hope I shall always have strength to obey what I know to be his wishes, without waiting for commands; though I don't know, for it's a very great temptation. Please don't offer them to me again."

"I won't," he said, coming back to her side; "I was sure you would not accept my offer. Nina, we'll correspond, won't we? This is a grand place for letter writing, and I can imagine I see you sitting by this desk inditing an epistle to me."

"I don't know," she answered, shaking her head, and smiling up at him; "I'm not much used to letter writing; never was allowed to have a correspondent; and I doubt if I'd better begin with a collegian. I shrink at the thought of the criticisms my poor performances might elicit. Besides, father might object."

"He ought not to, if we are to be brother and sister; and I don't believe he will. I'll ask him to-night."

Dr. Monteith's consent was readily obtained; but Nina would not pledge herself to anything. "I may write and I may not," she said, and, to Marchant's added vexation, went

on to insist that, if she did, all their letters must be submitted to her father for his approval.

But her parting words, as Marchant assisted her to her room that night,—his uncle kindly giving way to him for the once,—quite restored him to good humor.

“Good-bye,” she said, holding out her hand. “I hope you will distinguish yourself, and make us all proud of you.”

“Make *her* proud of me! ah, that is a motive to excite a fellow’s ambition,” he murmured, turning away with glowing cheeks and kindling eyes, as the door closed between them.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### A NEW EFFORT OF THE ENEMY.

WE must not let our darling feel dull and lonely when Marchant is gone,” Dr. Monteith had said to Aunt Lettice; and together they had planned a pleasant surprise for her in the shape of a beautiful and spirited little pony, and a handsome riding hat and habit.

Nothing could have delighted her more; she was deeply grateful, and keenly did her kind friends enjoy her raptures over it. Mr. Clemmens had begun very early to give her lessons in horsemanship, and for some time before his death it had been her favorite exercise. It was years now since she had had an opportunity to indulge in it; but, to the doctor’s great gratification, from the first moment of mounting Fearnaught—as she decided to call her pony—she seemed perfectly at home upon his back.

“I had thought to have the pleasure of giving you your first lessons in the art of sitting and managing a horse; but I see



some one else has been before me," said her father, with a pleased look.

"Yes, sir; Papa Clemmens. He took a great deal of pains to teach me, and said I was an apt scholar, and did him credit, because I was never afraid. But I am far from perfect in the art, and shall hope for a good many lessons from you."

"It is my purpose to ride with my little daughter every day, when professional duties do not interfere," he answered; and Nina's face sparkled all over with delight.

Her enjoyment of that first ride — taken soon after breakfast on the morning of Marchant's departure — was intense; but her watchful guardian would not suffer it to be prolonged beyond the bounds of prudence.

"When your excitement has cooled down, you will find yourself far more fatigued than you are now sensible of being," he said, as they turned their horses' heads toward home again.

"How kindly careful you are of me; and oh, how sweet it is to be so loved and cared for," she said, giving him a look full of grateful affection.

"My darling," he answered, "you cannot enjoy it more than I do. Let us thank and love our heavenly Father for giving us to each other."

Jarvis was waiting to take the horses, and to pay a compliment to his young mistress on her riding. The doctor led her into the library and seated her in an easy-chair, saying, "You must rest a little before attempting to change your dress."

"Thank you, sir," she answered, taking off her hat, and laying her head back against the velvet cushion. "What a delicious chair this is, and what a lovely, delightful room!"

"Ah, I believe you have never been in here before?"

"Yes, sir, once; yesterday for a few minutes with Marchant."

"Ah! He tells me you are very fond of books, which I am very glad to hear, for I have a great fondness for them

myself; and I hope we shall have many pleasant hours together here. What have you read?"

"A little history, a little poetry, some travels, and a few story-books. I had but little opportunity to cultivate a taste for reading while at Mr. Powell's, but little in Philadelphia, and still less at Millcote, where there was no public library; and I was kept constantly at work."

"At what?" he asked.

"Housework, cooking, sewing, tending children, weeding the garden, etc., just whatever Mrs. Powell wanted done," she answered, smiling up at him; for he was standing beside her, smoothing her hair with his hand.

"My poor darling, I'm afraid you have had a hard life of it," he said, tenderly; "but better days have come now, I think, and we will not fret about the past."

She caught his hand and kissed it, her eyes filling with grateful tears. "You are *so* good to me," she murmured, "so very, *very* good! Oh, if I could do something to repay you!"

"Only be my own loving little daughter," he said; "it is all I want."

"I will try, dear father," she faltered. "I do not need to try to *love* you. I could n't help it if I would; but I'll try to do and be all you wish."

"How much you are like her at this moment," he said, his voice trembling with emotion; "her very soul looks out at your eyes, — the attitude, the tones of your voice, all, all are hers. Oh, Nina, there are times when I cannot believe it possible that you are not her child and mine! and yet it seems equally impossible that you should be. I would give much, very much, to know the certainty in regard to your birth and parentage."

"Oh, let us forget the doubt, the apparent impossibility, and believe that we are truly father and daughter!" she cried, impetuously, clasping his hand in both of hers, and looking up with eager longing into his face as he bent over her.

“We will! we will! We will let the past go, and live in the happy present, leaving the future with our God, our loving and all-powerful heavenly Father,” he said, bending down to throw his arm about her and strain her to his breast.

For several minutes he held her in a close embrace, her head lying on his shoulder, her arms twined about his neck; then releasing her, he drew up a chair, and sitting down by her side, with her hand in his, talked of the future; of all that they would be to each other, the books they would read, and the walks and rides they would take together; of the advantages he could give her, and the pleasure he would take in superintending her education.

“I will mark out a course of reading for you,” he said; “there are some books we will read together; some that you shall read alone, perhaps giving me your impressions of them afterwards, or sometimes a synopsis of their contents.”

“I am afraid I will not know how to do so,” she replied; “I’m afraid you imagine me to be much brighter and more talented than I am. But may I come here and select any book I please, for my own private reading?”

“You may take what you like from this case, and this,” he said, rising, and going toward them to point them out. “This, you see, is marked history, this biography and travels, this other, poetry. I won’t yet let you select for yourself from it; there are some of Byron’s works, and a few others I do not wish you to read. And these in this last case, marked novels, you may consider entirely forbidden for the present.”

He turned toward her with a smile.

“I wish you would lock it up then and hide the key, for fear I may be a naughty girl some day when I’m here alone,” she said, playfully; “for I’m very fond of story-books.”

“No, indeed, I shall do no such thing; but shall trust entirely to your honor, your sense of duty, and your love for me.”

“But I am in earnest, father,” she said, looking up at him, as he came back to her side; “it will be a very strong temptation, and I would rather not be exposed to it.”

“Virtue that cannot stand temptation is worth very little,” he answered, gravely; “it is by resistance that we grow strong; so I shall not make it impossible for you to disobey me.”

“Then promise to punish me if I do,” she said, half in jest, half in earnest. “I must have something to help my resolution.”

“You are rather too old for that,” he answered, with a grave shake of the head; “unless you include under that head the thought of having pained and displeased a father who loves you very, very dearly.”

“That would be the worst punishment I could have,” she replied, with a slight quiver in her voice; “but in this, and many other things, you are very unlike Mrs. Powell. Why, this summer she locked me up in my own room for two weeks on bread and water, and only let me out then because she wanted my help about the house.”

“And what for?” he asked, his eyes kindling with indignant anger.

“Because I refused to go to church in an old, faded, half worn-out calico, short and skimpy, too, and sit beside her in a handsome silk. I told her I would n’t; and she found she could n’t force me to it with all her starving, locking-up, and lecturing. She said I was dreadfully wicked, the most depraved creature she ever saw; far worse than the heathen who had never despised the gospel privileges I was blest with, or failed to profit by a godly example daily set before them. Do you think so, father?”

“No; I think your feelings and behavior were perfectly natural under the circumstances, and her conduct entirely inexcusable; indeed, perfectly outrageous!” he answered, turning away and pacing hastily to and fro in unwonted excitement. “She ought to have provided you with at least decent clothing, which I am sure you must have more than earned; and, neglecting that, the sin of your refusal to attend church was more hers than yours, I think.

“But do not let us talk any more about her, darling; it

makes me too angry to hear how you have been abused," he added, coming to her side again to bestow upon her a tender, fatherly caress.

They were silent a moment, then Nina asked, "Won't you tell me why you forbid novels?"

"Certainly, you are a reasonable being, and should be treated as such. It is because I look upon novels as bearing the same relation to good, substantial, mental food, such as works on the arts and sciences, history in its various branches, theology, biography, etc., etc., as sweetmeats and confections do to bread and butter, meat, vegetables, etc.; and as it is ruinous to the stomach, especially of a very young child, or a delicate older person, to be fed entirely or principally upon such trash, so it is ruinous to the mind to feed largely upon highly-spiced fiction. Sweetmeats spoil the appetite for good, plain, nourishing food, by which the body grows and is made strong; and just so, tales full of exciting and improbable incidents, thus presenting false views of life, destroy the tone of the mind and take away its appetite for the substantial mental aliment necessary to its growth and strength.

"But don't misunderstand me, and think that I am condemning fiction in toto. There are many tales that I can honestly and heartily recommend to be read in moderation; tales which, though the incidents may be wholly, or in part, imaginary, yet give true views of life, and teach important truths. These I do not forbid," he added, with a smile, "but only claim the right to select and place in your hands; you shall read them in moderation, and at times when I think you need them as a rest to the mind after it has been at work."

"Thank you," she said, looking well pleased and satisfied; "but—but may I ask why you keep books which you consider hurtful? Please don't answer me if you think it an impertinent question," she added, with a blush and some embarrassment of manner.

"No, I do not think it impertinent," he replied, kindly. "There are books on my shelves which would probably be

injurious to you now, and yet may be read by you, some years hence, when your opinions are formed and your judgment is matured, with pleasure, and perhaps profit also; and when that time comes, the interdict shall be removed. But, till then, I hope my little daughter will be satisfied to allow me to choose her mental food for her."

"Oh, yes, yes!" she said, putting both hands into his, and looking up into his face, with a sweet expression of confiding affection. "I am glad, very glad, and thankful to have found such a kind, wise guardian and guide."

"May the Lord give me grace and wisdom to be both to you, my darling," he said, in low, moved tones, as he sat down and drew her to his breast.

There was a ring at the door-bell, and the next moment Adolphus appeared with the announcement that a gentleman was waiting in the office.

"Very well; I'll go to him," said the doctor, rising. "Nina—" He looked doubtfully at her.

"You are not afraid to leave me alone here for a few minutes, in broad daylight, now that I am pretty well and strong, are you, father?" she asked, looking up at him with a twinkle in her eye, that seemed to say such a fear would be very absurd.

"No, surely there can be no danger," he said, with a slight laugh; "and I shall probably be detained but a moment."

"And I may as well take this opportunity for changing my dress, and having a little chat with Aunt Lettice," she said, as he turned to go.

"Yes, do so," he answered, as he went out and shut the door.

She thought she would in a moment, but she had not yet entirely recovered from the fatigue of her ride; she felt weak and languid, and indisposed for any exertion. The chair was very comfortable, and, lying back among the cushions, she fell into a revery; then her thoughts became confused, and

ere five minutes had elapsed from the closing of the door upon her adopted father, her senses were fast locked in sleep.

There was a slight noise upon the balcony without, a sound as of a cautious tread of naked feet ; but she heard it not. Then a small boy, clad in tolerably clean, but worn and patched garments, barefooted, and wearing a coarse, broken-rimmed straw hat upon his head, stepped before the window, and peered cautiously in.

He perceived that Nina was the only occupant of the room, and, though he could not see her face, something in the listless attitude told him that she slept. Looking this way and that, he crept stealthily in and across the floor, till he reached her chair, when he laid in her lap a small, white object, which he had held tightly clasped in his hand. Then turning about, he fled with eager, trembling haste, never pausing to look behind him, and scarcely drawing breath till, diving into the shrubbery, he felt himself hidden from the view of the inmates of the house.

A board creaked as he crossed the balcony the second time, and Nina started and awoke. A tiny, sealed note lay in her lap. She caught it up, much wondering how it had come there, and looked at the superscription — “Nina Clemmens, Wald.”

“It is for me ! but from whom ?” she murmured. “The handwriting is strange ; and who is there that would write to me ? Not Marchant ; it is too soon.”

She tore it open with trembling fingers, and ran her eye over the page.

There were but a few lines, very plainly and clearly written, in the same hand as that of the address on the outside. There was none on the inside ; no signature appended ; and it was without date. It began abruptly :

“Have you no honest pride of independence, that you are willing to place yourself under such obligations to one upon whom you have no claim of kindred ? Your parents, who have never lost sight of you, are not pleased that it should be

so: they would have you leave Wald, and accept a home they have provided, where you may be educated and fitted for usefulness; while, at the same time, you preserve your independence by rendering some easy services in return. Accept this offer, and in course of time they will make themselves known to you,—reject it, and you must live and die in ignorance who or what they are. Place your reply in the hollow of a tree, on the hill beyond the rivulet that runs through the grounds of Wald.”

Nina read it with a rapidly paling cheek, and at the close fell back among her cushions with closed eyes and such a look of anguish on her wan face as might have touched a heart of stone.

The writer had artfully appealed to the strongest feelings of her nature, —her pride of independence, and her longing desire to solve the mystery connected with her birth, and to know those who were her true parents. And yet now she almost shrank at the thought of meeting them, so heartless and cruel did the words of the writer make them appear, — thus stepping in between the child they had abandoned to the tender mercies of strangers, and him who had so generously opened his heart and home to her. And oh, how exceeding sweet and precious seemed his love and tenderness, and his ever watchful, guardian care, when placed in such strong contrast to their coldness and neglect! How could she bear to leave him now? Her heart bled at the thought; and yet ought she not, if *they* wished it? and was it right to take so much from one who — though so inexpressibly dear — was yet indeed not of her kith or kin? Her head ached and her temples throbbed with the intensity of painful thought, her heart was torn with contending emotions, and thus Dr. Monteith found her on his return.

The change that had so suddenly come over her face, its deadly pallor, and the anguish written on every feature, startled and alarmed him.



“My darling!” he exclaimed, “what has happened? what so distresses you? Is it bodily or mental pain?”

She lifted her sad eyes to his face, and opened her pale lips to speak: but no sound came from them; and she turned away her head with a sigh that went to his heart. His eye fell on the fatal letter, which she still held fast, hardly conscious what she was doing.

“Is it this that has disturbed you?” he said, inquiringly, gently taking it from her. “Shall I read it?”

She gave a silent assent, and turned to watch his face as he read. She saw his cheek redden, and his eye flash with indignant scorn; and he finished by throwing it from him, and catching her in his arms.

“There, darling,” he said, laying her head tenderly against his broad, heaving breast; “fear nothing; they shall not take you from me, and I myself will answer this insolent note. I shall tell the writer that you have already given yourself to me, and have no choice left in the matter; and that yours is no state of mean, cowardly dependence; your filial love and obedience being far more to me than the paltry sums I bestow on your education and maintenance.”

“But if it is the will of my parents?” she faltered, as she clung about his neck.

“I do not believe it!” he answered. “I am satisfied that if the truth of the matter were known, your parents are either not living, or that you have been stolen from them, and they know nothing of your whereabouts or circumstances, and that this is but a new effort of your enemy, the dark woman, who would have carried you off before, and probably did so in the first instance. Failing to gain her ends by force, she is now trying stratagem.”

“Oh, do you think so?” cried Nina, sighing as if a load had been lifted from her breast.

“I do,” he said. “I feel pretty well satisfied of it in my own mind. What the woman’s motive is, I cannot tell; perhaps there is a claim to some property involved in the case:

but do not fear her. I think she will find herself powerless to do you harm."

A thought seemed to strike him. "Who was the bearer of that note?" he asked. "It is not the hour for the postman; and, besides, I should have heard him if he had come."

"I don't know," said Nina; "I had fallen asleep in my chair, and when I awoke it was lying in my lap."

He picked up the envelope and examined it.

"There is no postmark on it," he said.

He rang the bell, and as Adolphus appeared in answer, "Who brought this note?" he asked.

"Don't know, sah; did n't see nobody bring no note, sah!" replied the boy, opening his eyes wide with astonishment.

"Very well; it is no matter," said the doctor, dismissing him.

"She must have been in here!" cried Nina, glancing nervously around the room.

"That does not follow," he answered, quietly; "but henceforth you must not remain alone in any of these lower rooms with the doors and windows open — at least, not when you are in danger of falling asleep."

"I will not," she said, submissively, "though it is very hard to have to be so watched and guarded."

"Yes; but we will not allow it to fret and trouble us," he answered, cheerfully. "And now come and let us find Aunt Lettice, and I will read aloud an interesting book, while she knits and my daughter lies and rests."

He put the note into his pocket, and, giving her his arm, led her from the room.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## THE WOMAN IN BLACK AGAIN.

DINNER was over, and Nina had fallen asleep on a sofa in the parlor, where Dr. Monteith and Mrs. Barron were sitting.

“The child seems depressed, Clarence; what ails her? anything but Marchant’s departure, do you think?” asked the old lady, in an undertone.

The doctor replied by producing the anonymous note which had so disturbed her, and giving all the information he could in relation to it.

“It is too bad!” she exclaimed; “and I quite agree with you in the opinion that the parents have nothing to do with it. Very unnatural parents they would be, if they had; or, if they could have put such a child away from them. I dare say they are dead long since.”

“Most likely. And now, Aunt Lettice, we must do all we can to divert the child’s mind and keep up her spirits.”

“The pony will help very much,” said the old lady; “and in a few days when she is a little stronger, we will go into the city, and let her do some shopping.”

“An excellent prescription, if you are careful not to administer an overdose in the beginning,” he said, with a benevolent smile. “Shopping is a very interesting business to most of the fair sex; but we must not forget that it is also very fatiguing, and that the excitement may make Nina appear equal to more of it than she really is.”

“I will be careful. I think you may trust me for that,” said Aunt Lettice; “and, besides, I never could stand a great deal of shopping myself; it wears me out directly. Another thing, Clarence. I have always objected when you have

proposed adding to our list of servants. But now I think it would be well to get another chambermaid, and let Rose devote herself entirely to Nina as her waiting-maid and seamstress."

"By all means add as many as you please to the number of our servants, and let one or more be always within call of our darling, that she may feel perfectly safe from these unknown foes." He rose, stood a moment looking down on the beautiful, sleeping face, then abruptly left the room.

After he was gone, Aunt Lettice sat quietly knitting and thinking — an earnest, loving glance now and then directed to Nina, showing what was the subject of her thoughts. The dear old lady was busily contriving ways and means to interest this darling of her heart, and draw off her thoughts from all that might cause anxiety and distress.

Presently Nina awoke. There was a sad expression in her eyes as she turned them upon her old friend.

"Are you feeling badly, dear?" asked Aunt Lettice, in her gentle, affectionate tones.

"Only a little weak and weary, auntie," said Nina, gratefully. "I think one is apt to, sometimes, on waking from a nap. Talk to me, please, and I shall soon forget myself, which I would be very glad to do just now."

"Well, dear, let me tell you what I have been thinking about. I know you miss Marchant; and the very best cure for loneliness being plenty of employment of mind and body, I propose that you and I should begin now to consider what gifts we might prepare for him and your father against the Christmas holidays, when he will be with us again; and for any other friends whom you might like to remember."

Nina's face brightened instantly as her thoughts flew to her well-filled purse, the abundance of pretty things doubtless to be found in the city stores, and her knowledge of various kinds of fancy work, gained from school-mates and from her dear adopted mother; and she began an eager discussion of the subject, telling Aunt Lettice what she knew how to make,

and asking her opinion as to what would be likely to be most useful and gratifying to her father and Marchant.

The old lady found she had made a happy suggestion, for the look of care and distress returned no more that evening to the sweet face of her darling.

Nina's generous, affectionate nature rejoiced in the power to do kindness to others, and to prove in some slight degree her love and gratitude to those who were doing so much for her. And in the pleasant excitement she really quite forgot the anonymous note and its probable writer, nor thought of either again until she had retired to her own room for the night. And then she speedily dismissed her anxiety with the resolve to trust in her father's wisdom and protecting care.

Several rainy days followed, keeping her in the house, and trying her patience somewhat by preventing the enjoyment of her expected rides upon her pony. But Aunt Lettice and her father managed to make the time pass very pleasantly, and when at length the skies cleared and the sun shone out, she had gained sufficient strength for the all-important shopping expedition to the city.

The two ladies set out in the family carriage soon after breakfast, alone, — for the doctor had professional duties which imperatively demanded his attention; and Aunt Lettice remarked, smilingly, to Nina that it was just as well, since they might be making purchases they would not care to have him see.

Nina answered with a gay, glad laugh. Tastefully and richly attired, as became her station and circumstances, as the daughter of the wealthy owner of Wald, and leaning back upon the silken cushions of the smoothly-rolling carriage, while it passed swiftly over the very road which she had so lately travelled on foot and in the deepest poverty and distress, what wonder if her heart bounded with joy and exultation at the thought of the wondrous change in her condition and prospects?

She keenly enjoyed the ride, but not more keenly than the shopping that followed; it was so delightful, for the first time

in her life, to be making purchases with a full purse, and with the comfortable assurance that she would not be called to an account for her expenditure.

“There, dear, I think we have all we want now, and may tell Jarvis to drive directly home,” said Aunt Lettice, as they stepped out of a store on Chestnut Street, where Nina had been investing largely in materials for her fancy work; “or would you like to go somewhere for refreshments first?”

“No; home, if you please, auntie; it must be near dinner-time, I think,” the young girl answered gayly, putting a bundle in at the carriage-window as she spoke, then stepping back to let her old friend enter it first. As she did so, she felt a hand suddenly laid on her shoulder, and turning quickly, found herself face to face with that strange, mysterious woman whom she was beginning to regard with dread and horror.

A cold shiver ran through her whole frame, as for a single instant she gazed into the black depths of those malevolent, fiery eyes, and read in them scorn, contempt, and bitter, unrelenting hate. Then, with a low cry, she put out her hand to grasp the woman; but she was gone—lost in the hurrying crowd; for the streets were very full that day; and though Nina looked eagerly in the direction in which the dark figure had vanished, she could not distinguish it from the multitudes of others.

It had all passed so quickly that neither Aunt Lettice nor the coachman had noticed the woman; and great was the surprise and concern of the old lady to see Nina, as she followed her into the carriage, without apparently a moment's delay, sink back upon the cushions, trembling violently, and with cheeks and lips of an ashy pallor.

“Why, my dear child, what is it?” she cried, in excessive alarm.

“Put your arm around me and hug me up close, dear auntie,” whispered Nina, dropping her head on the old lady's shoulder, with a burst of tears. “It is nothing; and I shall be better in a moment.”

“Nothing?” The old lady’s tone was incredulous; but the carriage began rattling over the stones, the noise preventing further conversation for the present, and she had to content herself with silent petting and caressing till, reaching a quieter part of the road, they could again converse in an ordinary tone.

By this time Nina had recovered a tolerable degree of composure, and in answer to her old friend’s anxious questioning, said, “It was nothing, auntie, except that *she* stood beside me, — that dreadful woman, — and for one instant looked into my eyes with hers, that are so full of hate, then she was gone. I used to be brave — afraid of nothing; and I know not why it is that now I am so easily agitated and alarmed; perhaps because I am still weak.”

“Yes, dear, you are weak, and your nerves are weak; and when that is the case with us, we are very easily startled. But this woman’s conduct is infamous! I think Clarence must try to have something done with her.”

“Oh no, no; do not let him attempt it!” cried Nina, faintly, and again becoming much agitated; “for who knows what she might assert in regard to me? Perhaps she might even say she is my mother; though I cannot, *will* not believe it!”

“Oh, no, dear, *that* could not be; for a mother could not hate her own child. No, I cannot believe that she is related to you in the least; but doubtless she knows the secret of your birth,” said Aunt Lettice, earnestly, but speaking in a low tone, lest Jarvis should hear. “I think, however, we should conceal nothing from your father; and I am sure we may feel perfect confidence in his wisdom. He will never do anything that could bring sorrow and disgrace upon you.”

“Father is so good, so kind to me, that I would not wish to hide from him anything that he ought to know; but this would only trouble him, I think.”

“And if we don’t tell him, he will think the shopping has been too much for you, and will forbid us to go again,” said

Aunt Lettice, looking with sorrowful concern at the pale cheeks and sad countenance of her charge, and drawing her arm more closely about her.

“Ah, yes, we will have to tell him,” sighed Nina, “for he will be sure to see that something has gone wrong with me.”

And he did, the moment his eyes rested upon her face, as he came out to assist them to alight. “Why, my darling, your ride has not benefited you as I hoped it would,” he said, as he took her in his arms and carried her into the house. “I fear you and Aunt Lettice tried to do too much in one day,” and he turned inquiringly to the old lady, as he laid his burden gently down upon the sofa.

“No, it was not that, Clarence. I will tell you all about it in a moment; but let me get her a glass of wine first.”

“No: sit down, aunt, and let me wait upon her,” he said, politely, wheeling forward an easy-chair.

He left the room, and returned in a moment with the wine, which he held to Nina’s lips, saying, with gentle authority, “Drink this, daughter.”

She swallowed it obediently, then looking up affectionately into his face, “Don’t be worried, father,” she said, with a faint smile. “I don’t know why I should be so foolish; but I saw that woman again, that was all. For a single instant, as I was about to get into the carriage to come home, she stood beside me, touched my arm, looked straight into my eyes, and then was gone.”

He knew whom she meant; there was no need to ask. His brow contracted; he grew suddenly pale, and set his teeth firmly together; but it was a full minute ere a single word passed his lips.

Then he said, in a calm, quiet tone, “There must be a stop put to this. I shall set the detective police at work to ferret out the whole thing.”

“Oh, no, no!” cried Nina, seizing his hand and pressing it in both of hers; “don’t father, don’t, if you love me; for



who knows what she might say of me or do to me? Perhaps she might even find means to take me away from you; and oh, how could I bear that?"

"Never fear, darling. There, there, don't agitate yourself," he said, soothingly, bending down to pass his hand caressingly over her hair and cheek; "if she had law and justice on her side, you may rest assured she would not be resorting to these underhand means. And I think you may trust me to manage the thing in a way not to compromise you in the least."

She looked relieved, and, after a little more soothing, felt herself able to go to the dining-room, with the assistance of his arm, and to eat her meal with tolerable appetite.

Dr. Monteith was prompt and energetic in all he undertook, and before night had carried out his purpose—having sought an interview with the chief of the police and secured the services of one of the most expert detectives.

The head-gardener at Wald found himself very unexpectedly provided with a new assistant, at which he expressed no little surprise; remarking that "It was an odd notion of the doctor's to hire another hand just at the time o' year when there was but little to do; but he s'posed 't was some poor fellow that was out o' employment, and had come to Wald for help, as everybody did that needed it."

The other servants did not like the new-comer: they complained that he had very prying ways, and did n't stick at all closely to his work. They wondered, too, why he was almost always employed near the house, and why a small room on the ground-floor, at the back of the building, and with an outside door, was given up to his use, so that he could come and go at all hours without let or hindrance.

This man remained for several months, but during all that time nothing more was seen or heard of the mysterious dark lady.

For weeks Nina looked for her reappearance with a sort of nervous dread; but with returning health and strength, she

gradually recovered her natural fearlessness and gayety of disposition, and became the life of the house, and the very sunshine of their existence to her adopted father and Aunt Lettice.

She was very happy when she could contrive to forget the one bitter drop in her full cup of bliss, — the one cause of anxiety and humiliation; and this she generally managed to do by keeping herself fully occupied with work or amusement.

The doctor would not allow much study, but several hours of each day were spent in reading with him; and she had two or three lessons a week in music and drawing, given by masters who came to her from the city.

These, with a little plain sewing, her fascinating fancy-work, and her daily ride on Fearnaught, — when weather and roads permitted, and which was a never-failing delight to her, — filled up the days most pleasantly. There were quiet strolls with the doctor, too, and drives in the carriage when Aunt Lettice wished to take an airing in her company; or there was a visit to be paid to one of the neighbors, or to some poor or afflicted person in need of help and comfort, — both of which it was a joy to the dear old lady to bestow; for, like her Master, she delighted in going about doing good.

Dr. Monteith and Mrs. Barron, while keeping up a friendly intercourse with their nearest neighbors and the members of the church to which they belonged, had yet mingled but little in general society since the death of the doctor's wife, greatly preferring retirement and quiet. And Nina's coming among them made but little immediate change in this respect, as she was still too young to attend parties, or to receive or pay formal calls. There were but few girls of her own age in the neighborhood, and the three or four whose acquaintance she made proved uncongenial; but this gave her small concern, as she had so many home pleasures, and a lively correspondence carried on with Marchant de Vere, seemed to supply all that was needed of young companionship.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## VARYING MOODS.

MISS NINA, mother and me will be much obligated to you, indeed more than obliged, if you will be so good as to take charge of a few articles we 're a preparin' for the Christmas-tree," said Rose, one morning, as she was setting her young lady's room to rights; "'cause you see, miss, Dolphus he will peruse through all her drawers an' boxes, an' mine, too, every chance he gits, when he knows Christmas is a comin'; that child's curoosity does exceed all ever I seen!"

There was a merrytwinkle in Nina's eyes, but she answered quite demurely, that she would be happy to oblige them by providing accommodations for the "articles," and, pointing to the lowest drawer of her bureau, added that that was empty, and at their service.

Rose was profuse in her thanks and apologies for the liberty she had taken in making the request.

"No need of excuses, Rose; the drawer is empty, and quite at your service," said Nina, pleasantly; "but are you quite sure your 'articles' will be safe even there? Adolphus may come in here when you and I are out of the room."

"Oh, no, Miss Nina," cried Rose, quite aghast at the very idea of such presumption. "Dolphus exalts himself that he's a good boy; and he'd never take no such liberties with your belongings. He's ascertained his place better'n that, Dolphus has."

"Well, I hope so. I should be very angry if I knew him to come in here in my absence, or caught him meddling with anything belonging to me," said Nina, turning away to hide the mirth she could not suppress.

As the important day drew near, both Aunt Lettice and Nina grew very busy; there were numerous expeditions to the city, and Dr. Monteith found it necessary to be very strict in enforcing obedience to his commands in reference to the refraining from overwork, and the taking of proper rest and relaxation. Otherwise, Nina's new-found strength would have been utterly exhausted.

"This will never do! You are wearing yourself out!" he said, coming in one afternoon and taking a piece of embroidery from her hands. "I positively forbid you to take another stitch to-day."

"Oh, now don't be cross, father dear," she said, coaxingly, stroking his face with her pretty white hand. "You might let me work another hour; for it's only a week now to Christmas, and I've so much to do to get ready for it."

"No, not another stitch to-day," he repeated, with grave decision, though he accompanied the words with a slight caress. "I will supply you with money enough to buy gifts for all whom you care to remember; but I will not allow you to injure yourself in preparing them. Go and put on your wraps, and take a drive with me. The carriage will be at the door by the time you are ready."

Marchant came home early on the day before Christmas.

Nina met him with outstretched hand and the joyful exclamation, "Oh, this is being a good boy! I'm so glad you've come in such good season. We're going to trim the house, — that is, the parlor and sitting-room, dining-room and hall; and as soon as you get warm, you shall go with me to the woods after the evergreens. It's so mild to-day, father says I may ride Fearnaught, and you can have one of the other horses; and Dolphus is to take a hatchet, and cut down and bring home what we select. Will you go? Shall I ring and order a horse for you?"

"I shall be only too happy to accept your invitation, fair lady," he said, gallantly; "but let me wait upon myself." And springing up from his seat before the fire, he touched

the bell, and, as Adolphus appeared in answer, directed him to saddle Lightfoot,—the horse he usually rode when at Wald,—and bring him to the door along with Miss Nina's pony.

They were soon on their way to the woods, laughing and chatting right merrily, Adolphus following in a little one-horse wagon.

In another hour they returned, well laden with richly-tufted pine boughs, delicate hemlock sprays, and glossy laurel. Aunt Lettice and Rose were summoned to their assistance, and all hands set to work to ornament the house and give it a festive appearance.

The others constantly deferred to Nina, and perceiving this, she presently took the entire direction, displaying much artistic taste and skill, and great fertility of resources; and while giving prompt orders to the rest, taking hold of the work herself with the greatest energy and zeal. She was in the wildest spirits,—laughing, talking, and singing snatches of songs; running hither and thither with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes; now mounting the step-ladder, or a chair, to arrange or dispose a wreath or festoon with her own hands, or to make a suggestion to the others; then jumping down again to assist in the preparation of the wreaths and garlands.

But suddenly an arm was thrown about her slender waist; she felt herself hugged in a close embrace, a man's beard brushed her cheek, and Dr. Monteith's voice said, "My darling, you are doing entirely too much! you will feel it when the excitement is over. Go and lie down now till dinner-time, and so save yourself for to-night; and let the rest of us finish here."

"Oh, father, please let me stay. I am not in the least tired," she pleaded, in a slightly aggrieved tone.

"No: in my capacity of physician, I am a perfect autocrat," he answered, half playfully, as he drew her away to the quiet of the library. "I never allow a patient to dispute my will. Lie down here and rest till the dinner-bell rings.

Sleep if you can, but whether you find that possible or not, do not stir till the signal is given," he added, with gentle authority, placing her comfortably on a softly-cushioned lounge, and covering her with his cloak.

Then he went out and shut the door.

She was more than half vexed ; but even while telling herself that it was all nonsense, she was not a bit tired or in need of rest, she fell asleep, nor woke again till roused by the appointed signal. She opened her eyes to find the doctor standing over her.

"Ah, you will forgive me now, won't you?" he said, with a smile. "You have had a fine nap, though you were so fresh when you came in here."

"Yes, father, I do thank you for it, and for all your almost unnumbered favors," she answered, frankly, and with a look of grateful love. "You are so good to me! I had no idea I was so tired."

He smiled — a kindly, affectionate smile — and, giving her his arm, conducted her to the dining-room.

"What have you done with the Christmas-tree?" Nina asked, as the servants were removing the covers from the dishes.

"Oh, it's all safe," said Marchant. "I believe Aunt Lettice intends to employ me to set it up in the little back-parlor this afternoon."

"Yes, and to help us trim it," said the old lady; "we have quite a quantity of ornaments and colored tapers for it."

"And what if I should chance to see the gifts intended for me?" he asked, demurely.

"You need n't expect any," was the reply; "that is always the best plan."

He sighed deeply. "Ah, well, I suppose I may at least hope to be invited to the exhibition and distribution."

"Yes," said Nina; "we will probably employ you to light the tapers, and perhaps to distribute the gifts; and, if you are very good, there will doubtless be some trifle found for you."

“Are you to assist? or to lie in bed all the afternoon?” he asked.

“She may stay up until nine o'clock to-night,” said the doctor.

“What, so late as that? are you often so highly privileged, Nina?” cried Marchant, in mock astonishment.

“Yes, quite frequently,” she answered, with a merry look and smile; “and I hope, when I'm a little older—some months, perhaps—to be permitted to sit up till ten.”

The trimming of the tree, and a walk with Marchant, filled up the afternoon, and Nina retired to her own apartments to dress for the evening.

Rose, already arrayed in her best Sunday gown, but with a large, clean, check apron tied over to protect it, was in waiting to arrange her young lady's hair.

“Really, Rose, you are quite spoiling me,” said Nina, dropping into a chair, and glancing at the bed, where lay a very handsome dress of rich, dark silk, with all the accompanying et ceteras. “I'm becoming as useless and helpless as any fine lady in the land. I must put a stop to this, and begin to wait on and dress myself, or I shall lose all my independence.”

“Don't, now, Miss Nina; you know I quite depreciate the honor of assisting to disarrange your hair and dress; and if you'll 'low me, I'll begin at once,” said Rose, taking her young lady's hat and shawl, and putting them away in the wardrobe as she spoke. “I thought that silk would be becoming, and what you'd like to wear to-night,” she continued, coming back and beginning her work.

“Yes, it is what I wanted. But how fine you are to-night, Rose. Where did you get that? I never saw it before.” And Nina pointed to a tiny gold locket dependent from a ribbon about her handmaiden's neck.

“Oh, yes, miss; I've had it for two years an' better,” said Rose, with a gratified glance at her ornament; “but mother she won't let me wear it much, 'cause she says I'm too fond

o' finery. It was give to me, miss, by a gentleman that came here with an income in his leg, to get the doctah to cure him. He stayed a good long spell, an' I was kind o' spry to wait on him; and when he was going away, he axed me what I would like as a momentum of him?"

"A what?"

"A momentum, Miss Nina; something to keep him in remembrance like, you know."

"Yes, I understand; but what was it you said ailed his leg?" asked Nina, casting down her eyes to hide their merry twinkle.

"Oh, an income, miss. His leg was real bad; but of course the doctah cured it up at last. Well, miss, he axed me what I'd like for a momentum of him; and I said his doggeritype, so I could look at his face oncet in a while. So, when he was just a startin' away, he give me this here locket."

"What a curious complaint. I must ask father what she means," laughed Nina to herself. "Now, please make haste, Rose," she added, aloud, "for I'm afraid the tea-bell will ring soon."

"I'll do my best endeavors, Miss Nina; and it won't take long, for everything is laid out ready, 'cept your ornamentals. I didn't like to meddle with them. Will you wear your pearls? they'll look lovely with this dark dress."

"Yes," Nina answered, with a strange smile.

She was thinking of the old faded delaine she had worn on that same evening one year ago.

Soon after tea, the doors of the back-parlor—which had been kept closed for several hours—were thrown open, displaying a large, beautifully ornamented and well-laden Christmas-tree; and when it had been sufficiently admired, the distribution of the gifts began. Aunt Lettice took them down one by one and handed them to Marchant, who read out the names written on the labels, and called for the fortunate owners to step forward and take possession.



Old Dinah was highly pleased with a black alpaca dress, the gift of Nina. "Bress your dear heart, honey," she said, curtsying low before the giver, and chuckling with delight; "how could you go for to spend so much on ole Aunt Dinah? I never thought to get nothin' half so handsome; and I'm a thousand times more 'n obliged to you."

"You are very welcome," said Nina, smiling; "but indeed you deserve more than that for your kindness to me when I was so ill. Does n't she, father?" she asked, turning to him, for he was close at her side.

"Indeed she does, and shall have it, too," he replied; "see Dinah, Mr. Marchant has something more for you."

"Oh, but it's too much!" she cried, as he came up and laid on top of the dress-pattern, which she held in her arms, a gay handkerchief, a new white apron, and a ten-dollar bill.

"There, mother, move away now, and let me thank my young lady for this splendid present," said Rose, pushing her parent rather unceremoniously aside. "I'm delighted, Miss Nina! An alpacky dress for me, too! I never suspicioned you'd spend so much on me; and my gratification is unboundless; an alpacky is such a very beneficial dress as well as so handsome."

"Ah, then I may hope you will not need much of my attention this year, Rose," said the doctor, laughing.

"Why, how deaf you all are in this corner!" exclaimed Marchant, coming up to them. "Here, Nina, are your gifts. And, uncle, these are yours."

How Nina's eyes danced and sparkled at sight of hers! A beautiful gold watch and chain from her father, a set of jewelry from Aunt Lettice, and a pair of gold bracelets from Marchant.

And the doctor and his ward seemed no less pleased with their slippers, worked by her own fair hands; while Aunt Lettice pronounced a point-lace set which she received from her, "exquisite in texture and design," adding, with a smile, "Now I know where, and on what errand, you and your

father went yesterday, and why you were so willing to let me stay at home."

No one had been forgotten; the servants had now all received their gifts and retired, apparently highly gratified.

The evening passed quickly, but Nina was weary enough to be quite willing to retire to her room at nine o'clock. She soon dismissed Rose to the merry-making in the kitchen, and donning a warm dressing-gown and slippers, wheeled an easy-chair to the fire, and sitting down in it with her feet on the fender, her elbow on her knee, and her cheek resting on her hand, lost herself in reverie, — going from the delightful present, with its luxury and ease, and, above all, its tender love and care surrounding her as with an atmosphere of perpetual sunshine, to the hard past, with its toil, its privations, its dearth of kindly sympathy and affection.

Before her mental vision there rose a picture of the little sitting-room at Millcote, — Mrs. Powell, with her cold, stern face, seated at her never-ending sewing, her mending-basket, filled with half-worn garments, by her side; Mr. Powell, opposite, perhaps bending over his evening paper, his meek, downcast air, and occasional furtive glance at his wife, proclaiming him the henpecked partner of a strong-minded woman; the children giving and receiving a cold good-night, and creeping up to bed with sighs and whispered wishes that "mother would let them hang up their stockings, as Nina had told them she did when a little girl at Oakdale, and that Santa Claus would bring them something pretty and something good."

Then a bright smile broke over the dreamer's face, and she murmured, half aloud, "How glad they will be to-morrow morning when my packages get there, and their mother opens the one directed to them. How Essie and Belle will jump and clap their hands at sight of the beautiful dolls with such lovely curls, and eyes that will open and shut, and the trunk full of clothes for each; and Ned will be quite as full of joy over his picture-books, his new ball and top, and many col-

ored marbles. And poor old Peggy! how pleased she will be with her bundle, the warm shawl and nice new dress. But, perhaps, Mrs. Powell will not give the children theirs, though I did put in a fine pocket handkerchief for her, to put her in a good humor about the rest. Could she be so cruel to her own little ones? Well, I don't know; she can be very cruel; oh, so different from my darling mamma!" And the thoughts went further back to the child-life in the old farmhouse, and the mother-love that made it so bright and joyous; and a few quiet tears were dropped to the memory of that early and beloved friend.

"What, not in bed yet, darling?" said a voice at her side, while a hand was laid softly and caressingly on her bowed head.

She started, and looked up with a loving smile.

"No, father dear. I'm afraid I'm very naughty, but it is so cosy here by this nice fire, and I got to thinking."

"And crying, too," he said, half reproachfully, seeing the tell-tale drops glittering on her eye-lashes; and as he spoke, he passed his arm about her waist, and lifting her from her chair, ensconced himself therein, and drew her to a seat upon his knee. "Can it be that my pet is unhappy to-night? that my bird finds her gilded cage a prison? her doting father an unloved jailor?" he asked, pressing her close to his heart.

"Oh, no, no; please don't think it!" she implored, with her arms about his neck and her cheek laid against his; "you are so good, so kind to me! I don't know how I could love you one bit better if I were sure you were my own father! and oh, I have been so happy sitting here and thinking how different it all is with me now from what it was this time last year."

"The tears were not all sorrowful ones then?" he said, inquiringly, passing his hand fondly over her curls.

"No, sir; but I was thinking of Mamma Clemmens, and the very happy Christmas times I used to have in the old farmhouse at Oakdale."

"Tell me about it," he said; and she obeyed, pouring

out her simple story from a full heart, and in tones tremulous with tender memories of the dear ones gone ; while he listened with truly parental sympathy and interest.

She wound up with a description of Christmas days under Mrs. Powell's rule. His arm tightened its clasp about her as she drew this last picture.

"Thank God that you are done with that woman now," he said, in a moved tone, and pressing his lips to her cheek ; "may he change her heart for the sake of her own little ones. And now, my darling, you must go to rest ; promise me that you will do so at once, for late hours are very bad for one in your feeble state of health."

She gave the required promise, and with a blessing and a tender good-night, he left her.

She slept soundly till morning, rose from her bed full of gay, girlish mirth and gladness, and met him with her "merry Christmas" as he left his room in answer to the breakfast-bell.

"Thank you, darling ; and may it be a merry and very happy one to you ; and may we spend many a happy New Year together, if it shall please the Lord to spare us to each other," he said, with emotion, as he drew her to him with a fond caress, at the same time slipping a beautiful diamond ring upon her finger. "It was hers," he whispered, "and I could not bear to see it worn by any other but her living image."

"Oh, father, how lovely ! and how doubly precious because it has been worn by her," she murmured, deeply moved by this convincing proof of his strong affection.

Her arm stole round his neck, and her cheek was laid to his, while her eyes filled, then fairly overflowed with glad, grateful tears.

"What is it, my darling ?" he asked, tenderly.

"Nothing ; only you are too, *too* good to me. I don't deserve it ; I never *can* deserve it." And she hid her face on his breast.

“It is for what you are, and because I cannot help it, that I love you with such intense affection, dear one,” he said, softly stroking her hair. “But you have done nothing to show yourself undeserving. And now dry your eyes, and let us go down to breakfast; Aunt Dinah’s chicken and waffles will be getting cold, and the good old soul will be quite vexed and troubled.”

Her tears this morning were but an April shower, already past as she lifted her face and looked up into his with a bright, joyous, loving smile.

“I don’t know why I cry so easily of late,” she said. “Mrs. Powell used to say that the fact that I shed tears so seldom was a most convincing proof of my exceeding hardness of heart.”

“And how about herself?” he asked. “I should judge, from your description of her, that she was one of those women who are not much given to the melting mood.”

“No, I never saw her cry; but with her, of course, that was only an evidence of strength of character.”

“Exactly,” he answered, with a smile. “Well, my child, I trust that as your nerves recover their strength you will find yourself quite as able as formerly to control your feelings, when it is desirable that you should. It is not *always* desirable to repress all emotion, lest we grow hard and unfeeling.”

“And he has given you this?” said Aunt Lettice, taking the young girl’s hand in hers, as they found themselves alone for a few moments that morning. “Child, child, he must love you very, very dearly! This was her engagement-ring, and never off her finger while she lived.”

The next two weeks passed by very quickly to Marchant and Nina, who were seldom apart during the day; filling up much of their time with walks and rides when the weather would permit; and when within doors, reading, talking, or playing games together; always glad to have Aunt Lettice or

the doctor join them in their amusements, but never complaining of being left alone with each other.

The old lady would often look after them with a quiet smile and a nod of satisfaction, but kept her thoughts on the subject to herself.

It was Marchant's last evening, for he was to take his departure early the next day. The two were alone in the library—Aunt Lettice and the doctor having just been called to the parlor to receive some visitors.

“What a glorious night!” exclaimed Marchant, walking to the window; “the full moon makes it almost as light as day, and it's as mild, too, as one might expect it to be in April. Suppose we take a promenade on the balcony, Nina. I don't think it could hurt you, if you wrap up well.”

“No, of course not; and it would be perfectly delightful!” she cried, springing up from her low seat by the fire. “Just wait one minute till I get my things.”

She ran out of the room, and was back again almost immediately, wrapped in a nubia and a thick, warm shawl.

“Will I do?” she asked, gayly.

“Yes, of course you will; that cloudy thing you have on your head is very becoming,” he answered, offering his arm, with an admiring look.

They had paced back and forth several times, and Marchant was deep in the story of some wild college boy adventure, when Dr. Monteith's voice was heard at the window. “Nina, my child, is it possible you are out here? Come in at once; this damp night-air is by no means good for you.”

For the first time she felt toward her dearly loved, adopted father the rising of her old rebellious spirit. “Dear me, how provoking!” she muttered; “such nonsense, too; for I'm sure it is n't hurting me a bit.”

“It is n't cold, uncle,” said Marchant: “it is quite like a spring night; and you know this is my last evening; do let us stay out a little longer.”

“Yes, father, please do. I’m not the least bit cold,” said Nina.

“No. I have already said that the night-air is not good for you, and you must come in at once,” he answered, in a more peremptory tone than ever he had used to her before.

She was quite angry for the moment; a spirit of opposition seized her, and she would perhaps have ventured to disobey, if Marchant had not drawn her gently in, whispering, “Never mind; we will finish our story by the sitting-room fire.”

“Treating me just like a baby!” she said, with a little angry shake of her shoulders, speaking in an undertone, but loud enough for Dr. Monteith to hear.

He gave her a look of grieved displeasure, but, without a word of reproof, turned away and took up a book.

Nina’s heart smote her, and she would have given anything to recall her words. But Marchant led her to the sitting-room, wheeled an easy-chair to the fire, and, seating her in it, gallantly removed her wraps; then took a chair by her side, and went on with his story.

But it had lost its interest for Nina. She sat in perfect silence, with downcast eyes and changing color. Presently she started up.

“Why, what is the matter?” he asked, in surprise.

“Oh, I can’t stand it! I must go this minute and make my peace with father!” she cried, impetuously.

“Oh, nonsense! Are you worrying yourself about that? I’m sure you need n’t. Uncle is not the man to lay it up against you; he will never mention it again; perhaps never think of it.”

“But I shall. I shall never be able to forgive myself, or to look him in the face again, if I don’t go and beg pardon. Oh, how could I, how *could* I behave so to him after all his unmerited goodness to me! I hate myself for the base ingratitude! I never felt so ashamed in my life.” And she put up her hands to hide the burning blushes on her cheeks.

Marchant stepped out of her way, and looked admiringly after her as she hastily left the room.

“She’s a girl in a thousand!” he murmured. “If she feels and acts so to her husband, their quarrels will be neither many nor lasting.”

Dr. Monteith sat by the table reading. He did not seem to hear Nina’s light step as she entered and drew near his chair. She could get but a partial view of his face, but she thought it wore that grieved expression still, and her eyes filled.

“Father, *dear* father, I am so sorry,” she whispered, laying her hand softly on his shoulder; “I am so sorry. Will you, can you forgive me?”

Instantly his book was pushed aside, his arm thrown around her, and she drawn to a seat upon his knee.

“Are you very angry with me?” she asked. “Oh, I am so angry with myself! so ashamed of my base ingratitude —”

“There!” he interrupted, “don’t exaggerate your fault; you should never do that. No, I am not angry, my darling; yet very, very glad that you have come with this confession; and you are fully and freely forgiven.”

He caressed her tenderly as he spoke.

“I don’t deserve to be treated so,” she said, remorsefully; “I wish you would punish me. I think I should feel a great deal better if you would.”

“What shall I do? Stand you in the corner? or send you to bed?” he asked, with a slight smile. “I fear that to do either would be treating you more than ever like a baby, and am not at all sure that you would not grow angry and rebellious again, if I should attempt it. I am sorry you are so proud as not to be willing to take free forgiveness,” he added, more gravely, “but I think you must; I do not wish to treat you like a very little child, and being obliged to humble your pride to accept unmerited forgiveness, may perhaps have a better effect than anything else.”



“You know me better than I do myself, I believe,” she murmured, half averting her face, in the vain effort to hide the vivid blushes that suffused her cheek. “I am afraid it was pride; but —” her lip trembled — “it is not in me to be humble.”

“No; nor in any natural heart,” he said, gently; “true humility is the gift of God. Seek it of Him, darling, and, oh, let his goodness to you — so far beyond mine — lead you to repentance toward him.”

“Ah, if I were only as good as you, father!” she murmured, putting her arms around his neck. “I wish I was.”

“Ah, my child, I am not at all good; very far from it,” he said, with a sigh. “Let Christ be your pattern, dear one; not me, nor any other frail, fallible mortal.”

“I am afraid you must be sadly disappointed in me,” she said, after a moment’s silence. “Could you have believed that I would ever behave so ill to you?”

“Yes; it was no more than I have expected from the first. I knew you had a strong will of your own, and I could not hope that it would not occasionally clash with mine. Do you not remember that I told you so, and that in such cases you would find that yours must be the one to yield?”

“Yes, sir: I do remember it now.”

“And so I am not disappointed in you, and think you neither better nor worse than I did before,” he continued. “And perhaps,” he added, with a smile, “you will be surprised when I tell you that I fully expected that you would come to me, just as you have done — with confession and a request to be forgiven; for I felt sure that my darling was possessed of too truly noble a nature not to be ready to acknowledge a fault when once thoroughly convinced of it. And yet I did not expect you so soon. I thought it would take conscience rather longer to get the better of pride and ill-humor.”

“Thank you! oh, thank you for that!” she cried, with earnest gratitude.

“I have only given you your due,” he said. “And now you may go back to Marchant. I know he is grudging me every minute of your society; and it is too bad, too selfish in me to rob him so, seeing it is his last night.”

“You selfish, dear father?” she exclaimed. “I should be very angry with any one else who should dare to hint such a thing.”

“Ah, and I am not sure I should quite relish it myself,” he answered, with a slight laugh as he let her go.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### A NEW-COMER.

**A**NOTHER month of the cheerful, busy, happy life at Wald had glided swiftly away, each day finding Nina gaining in health and strength, and, if it were possible, more firmly established in the affections of her adopted father and aunt, and loving them with a deeper, truer, tenderer love.

It was a cold afternoon early in February. A fair wintry scene presented itself in front of the bow-window of the library where Nina sat with her writing-desk before her, busily engaged in preparing her French exercise. The ground was thickly carpeted with snow, and every branch and twig of the leafless trees had donned a robe of the same pure and spotless hue; a deep drift had filled up, and blotted out of existence for the time, the little mossy dell; the tiny rivulet locked in icy fetters had ceased its song; and the parterres, once so gay with many-colored flowers, now presented one unbroken sheet of glistening white.

Since early morning the clouds had been industriously sending down their feathery flakes, and, thickly veiling the face of the “king of day,” had not once allowed him to

look upon the fairy scene they were creating ; but now, as he drew near the horizon, their handiwork complete, they suddenly parted from before him, and he poured down a flood of glory, lighting up the whole scene with such wondrous beauty that Nina lifted her head and looked out upon it with a low exclamation of delight. For one moment she feasted her eyes with it, then turned to claim her father's sympathy, and to make him a sharer in her pleasure.

Ever since dinner he had been sitting before the fire in a strangely abstracted mood, and more than once she had sent toward him a wondering glance, not wholly unmixed with anxiety, lest some trouble had come upon him. She grew doubly anxious now, for he had not moved or changed his position in the least, or taken the slightest apparent notice of the sudden burst of sunlight. Pushing her books aside, she rose hastily, and drew quickly, but noiselessly, near to the side of his easy-chair.

"Father, dear father, what is the matter? Do you know that you have sat here for a long, long time neither reading nor writing, and yet have not spoken one word to me? Is anything wrong? Are you in any trouble? Have I grieved or displeased you in any way?" she asked, softly laying one hand on his shoulder, while with the other she smoothed back the hair from his broad, white forehead, then pressed her lips upon it.

He was not a man with whom many persons would have ventured to take liberties, but Nina well knew that she was a privileged character ; she might not venture to disobey his commands, but she knew a caress from her was always pleasing to him, and her perfect, filial love cast out all fear, and made his slightest wish her law. Never, save in that one instance, had she shown or felt the least wilfulness toward him.

"No, my pet, nothing is wrong ; I was only thinking," he said, making her take a seat on his knee, while he returned her caress with interest. "Displeased with you, darling? why, you are the very light of my eyes and joy of my heart."

Nina laughed,—a bright, joyous, happy laugh. “I often wonder,” she said, stroking his face, and giving his whiskers a gentle pull, “what Mrs. Powell would say if she could see how I am treated here, especially by you—what a pet and plaything you make of me. I think I can see her severe, contemptuous look, and hear her pronounce me a great baby for submitting to be set upon your knee.”

“Well, no matter; she is not here, fortunately; and if she was, I should not ask her leave to treat my little girl as I think proper. You are the only daughter I ever had to pet or fondle,” he added, a little sadly; “and as I enjoy it very much, I hope you will never tire of it, or consider yourself too old to submit to it.”

“Never while it pleases you, father dear,” she answered, giving him an affectionate hug. “But, now, won’t you please tell me what you have been thinking of all this time?”

“Curious, like the rest of your sex, eh?” he said, laughing. “Well, yes, I will tell you. I have, as you know, a very interesting Bible-class of young men, whom I meet every Sabbath afternoon. Well, sauce-box, what are you laughing at?”

“Only at the idea that I knew that your young men were interesting, having never spoken to one of them in my life.”

“Well, I have found them so, at all events,” he said, smiling, and pinching her cheek; “and they come to me with their troubles and perplexities.”

“Yes; they know they’ll get sympathy, and something more, if it is needed,” she said, giving him another hug.

“There, be quiet, and don’t interrupt me again, if you want to hear the rest of my story,” he said, with pretended displeasure; at which she only laughed.

He shook his head at her, and went on.

“Bertram Cathcart is the name of one of my class,—a remarkably intelligent, unassuming lad, probably about nineteen years of age. He has been attending the class for a year past;

but, though I have from the first felt strangely drawn to him, I never, until to-day, knew anything of his history or circumstances, except that he was a student in one of the medical colleges, and, judging from his dress, by no means poor. In appearance and manners, he is unmistakably a gentleman; and he is also uncommonly handsome. This morning he came to me and told me that he was in great trouble."

Dr. Monteith paused, and, looking at Nina with a peculiar smile, remarked: "His story is something like yours, daughter; yet not altogether, either. He was brought up a Romanist, the only child of a very wealthy merchant of St. Louis, whose wife died at the time of the birth of her son, and who never married again. Mrs. Cathcart died in Philadelphia; and as she had no near relatives who felt able or willing to take charge of the little one, he was consigned to the care of a nurse,—a married woman of the lower class,—who took him to her own house; where he was left by his father for two or three years.

"At the end of that time Mr. Cathcart called for his child, and took him home to St. Louis, keeping him there with himself until, on growing up to an age for deciding his future course in life, he chose the medical profession, when he was sent on here to fit himself for it.

"There was a time in the fall when I missed him from my class for several Sabbaths; and when he returned, I noticed that he wore a band of black crape on his hat. He tells me that his absence was occasioned by the sickness and death of the elder Mr. Cathcart, who had been to him a most kind and indulgent parent, and whose loss he feels acutely; all the more on account of some painful scenes which they passed through while the old gentleman lay on his death-bed.

"The cause of the trouble between them was Bertram's conversion to Protestantism, which angered his father exceedingly. Mr. Cathcart required his son to recant his errors, and promise never to return to them; threatening, in case of refusal, to

disinherit him, and leave everything to the church; to which course he was strongly urged by his confessor. The young man could not give up his faith; he adhered firmly to it; when, to assist the father's failing resolution, they told him that Bertram was not his son: that his own child had died in infancy, and another had been substituted for it; and in proof of their assertion, they brought forward the nurse, who testified that such was the fact; that his child had died, and, fearing that he would blame her, accusing her of carelessness in regard to it, and also loath to lose the additional income which its board afforded her, she had substituted for it a little friendless orphan, whom she had presented to him as the very child he had committed to her care.

"Bertram doubts the story; but whether true or false, it robbed him of his inheritance, for Mr. Cathcart accepted it as true, and at once yielded to the wishes of his confessor."

"What a shame!" cried Nina, warmly. "And did he get nothing at all?"

"A very small sum, — two hundred dollars, I believe, — instead of the half a million, or more, he had been brought up to expect. And now he must do something for himself. He came to me to know if I could put him in the way of getting employment; and I have invited him to make my house his home for this winter, and to pursue his studies with me. What do you think of it?"

"That it was the kindest thing in the world, and exactly like my dear father."

He shook his head, with a half smile. "Is that a wilful misunderstanding of my question? I wished to know if it would be disagreeable to you to have this lad admitted into our family circle?"

"Why, no, father; judging from your description, I should think it would add to our enjoyment to have him here; and I feel so sorry for him that I am very glad you asked him to come. But what does Aunt Lettice think?"

“Aunt Lettice always rejoices in seeing other people made happy, and is ready and eager to do her part for Bertram.”

“When is he coming?” she asked.

“I have sent Jarvis in for him and his luggage, and am now looking for them every moment,” he said, consulting his watch. “Ah, yes, and there they are now,” he added, as the merry sound of sleigh-bells was heard without.

Nina sprang up. The doctor rose too, and went hastily from the room, leaving her alone.

Her first impulse was to follow him and join in the welcome to the young stranger, in whom his story had greatly interested her; but on second thoughts she decided that to stay where she was would better befit her age and sex, and dropping into the easy-chair her father had just vacated, she took up a book, Rose coming in at the moment with lights. But though her eyes were on the printed page, she gathered no meaning from the words, but was listening eagerly for approaching footsteps, and wondering within herself the while if Bertram Cathcart would prove as pleasant a companion and friend to her as had Marchant de Vere.

Presently she caught the sound of her father's firm, decided step, now accompanied by another, a trifle lighter and more elastic, yet not a whit less manly. The door opened, and Nina looked up.

“My daughter, Bertram,” said the doctor. “Nina, this is Mr. Bertram Cathcart. I hope you will become very good friends.”

“I hope we shall. Welcome to Wald, Mr. Cathcart,” said the young girl, rising, and offering her hand in her warm, impulsive way.

The lad took it gratefully, saying, in a slightly tremulous tone, “Thank you, Miss Monteith; you are very kind.”

Their eyes met, and the same thought—that this was not their first meeting—instantly flashed across the mind of each. They exchanged another look—doubtful, hesitating, on her part; eager, questioning, joyful on his.

The doctor looked wonderingly from one to the other. "What is it?" he asked. "You have met before, eh?"

"Yes,—no, sir,—I cannot tell," replied Bertram, with hesitation, and still looking at Nina. "Miss Monteith's face is no ordinary one; and yet it seems familiar to me, though I cannot tell where I have seen it before."

"In the street, or some public conveyance, probably," suggested the doctor. "But here is another friend to whom I must introduce you," he added, as at that moment the door opened, and Aunt Lettice came in. "A dear relative of mine, Mrs. Barron, or Aunt Lettice, as we all love to call her. Aunt Lettice, this is my young friend, of whom I have been telling you, Mr. Bertram Cathcart."

She had already taken his hand in hers, holding it with a gentle, kindly pressure, while her sweet, loving, motherly eyes sought his face. He had a fine, open, manly countenance; clear, honest, hazel eyes; a broad, white brow, and curling chestnut hair.

"Welcome to Wald, my dear boy," she said. "You must call me Aunt Lettice as the others do, and let me be a mother to you."

"Thank you a thousand times, dear madam," he answered, with emotion. "I shall be only too glad, too happy. I have never known a mother's love, and have always thought of it as the greatest of all earthly blessings."

She had not released his hand, and still retaining it, and looking earnestly, first at him and then at Nina, "Clarence," she said, "there is a resemblance between these two children. Do you not see it?"

Dr. Monteith started, and looking intently from one to the other, "I think there is," he said, "though it is not very striking: their features are not the same, and Nina's hair and eyes are much the darker."

"I think Mr. Cathcart resembles father far more than he does me, Aunt Lettice," remarked Nina. "I see a very strong likeness—hair, forehead, and nose are just the same;



complexion, too ; and the expression is similar, particularly about the eyes, though they differ in color. Don't you see it?" and she stepped to her father's side, and laying her hand on his arm, looked earnestly at him and then at Bertram.

Mrs. Barron's eyes followed hers. "Yes, I do," she exclaimed ; "Clarence, he would easily pass for your son."

Dr. Monteith grew very pale. "I think he is about the age my boy would have been," he said, in low, sad tones. Then, as if struck by a sudden thought, "Bertram," he asked, turning quickly to him, "did the woman — your nurse — give any account of the manner in which she had obtained possession of you? did she tell you who were your true parents?"

"She said that I was an orphan whose father died before his birth, and whose mother — lying on her death-bed at the time of the decease of the true Bertram Cathcart — was very glad and thankful to have me substituted for him."

The doctor sighed, and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"A plausible story," said Aunt Lettice ; "yet quite as likely to be false as true. But there is the tea-bell." And she led the way to the dining-room, followed by the others.

Later in the evening Nina and Bertram sat on opposite sides of the fire in the library, conversing in subdued tones, for Aunt Lettice had fallen asleep in her chair, and they did not wish to disturb her. Dr. Monteith had been called from the supper-table to attend a patient, and had not yet returned.

"I have been trying all the evening to recollect where I have seen a face resembling yours, Miss Nina," said Bertram, looking intently at her, "and I think I have it now. Five or six years ago I was on a visit in Philadelphia, and one day while walking behind a little girl, I saw her drop her fan. I picked it up, ran after her, and presented it ; and as she turned to take it, and to thank me, I saw her face, and thought it the most beautiful I had ever looked upon. It was raining quite fast, and she had no umbrella ; of which I was very glad, for it gave me a good excuse for offering to be her escort to her home, or wherever she was going. And she accepted my

offer, and chatted pleasantly with me until we reached her place of destination, where we parted. I have often wished I could see her again, but never have, unless you are she, which, although the resemblance is very strong, I suppose is hardly likely; for Dr. Monteith's daughter would not, of course, have been living there; as I have accidentally heard that he was born in this house, and has owned it ever since his father's death."

Nina had listened in silence, a crimson tide rushing over cheek and brow, and tinging with its ruddy hue even the pure white of her beautiful throat and neck; but her face was half averted, so that Bertram could not read its expression.

He had finished what he had to say, and for several minutes nothing was heard but the occasional dropping of a coal from the grate, the monotonous ticking of the clock on the mantel, the roaring of the wind through the trees without, and Aunt Lettice's gentle breathing.

A struggle was going on in Nina's breast. Should she tell this young stranger the truth about this matter? letting him into the secret that she was not really the high-born child of wealth she seemed, making him acquainted with that which was the one drop of gall in her otherwise overflowing cup of earthly felicity, — the grief, and shame, and horror of her daily life, the skeleton in her house, the night-mare of her existence, which it was her constant effort to forget? or should she, by her persistent silence, confirm him in the belief of that which was not true? could she, who had always so despised and condemned hypocrisy and deceit, be guilty of them now? No, a thousand times no! her innate truthfulness conquered, triumphing over pride and false shame; and turning to him her blushing, troubled face, she said, with noble frankness, "It was I, Mr. Cathcart. I am Dr. Monteith's daughter only by adoption, and was then living with a woman whom I supposed to be my aunt, but who is in fact not related to me in the least, as she afterwards told me. My story is very much like your own, and I know not who or what my parents were."

He started up and took her hand in his, looking down upon her with a face radiant with delighted surprise.

“Ah, then,” he cried, “who can say that we are not brother and sister? Perhaps we shall some day learn with certainty that we are. Oh, what joy it would be to me! for I am very lonely, without one relative in the whole wide world,” he added, in tones of sadness that touched her heart.

“Let us be brother and sister then, if it will make you so much happier,” she said, looking up into his face with glistening eyes; “why should we not?”

“We will, we will, then: it is a bargain, if your father consents,” he cried, with joyful eagerness.

“What is that I am to consent to?” asked Dr. Monteith, entering the room as Bertram pronounced the last words; and coming quickly toward them he glanced in astonishment from one to the other, the thought flashing upon him—as the young man dropped Nina’s hand, and stepped back, blushing and embarrassed—“Can it be possible that he has been proposing to the child on this the first evening of their acquaintance?”

It was by no means a pleasant thought; and the explanation which Nina gave in a few brief words, as she rose and took his hand in both of hers, gazing with filial affection into his face while she spoke, was a very great relief.

“Ah,” he said, when she had finished, “my consent is freely given to that arrangement. But, Bertram, if you are to be brother to my daughter, you will have also to be my son. Can you consent to that?” And as he spoke he held out his other hand to the lad, with a kind, fatherly smile.

“You can never mean it, Dr. Monteith? you cannot really mean to adopt me as your son?” cried Bertram, taking the offered hand, and pressing it to his lips with much emotion.

“Yes, my dear boy, I do. I have had it in my heart to do so ever since you told me your sad story,” said the doctor, drawing him nearer to him; “and if you will be a son to

me, rendering me filial love, honor, and obedience, I will gladly be a father to you. God gave me a son and daughter who would, if now living, be about as old as you two; but they were taken from me in infancy. Nina is filling the daughter's place; will you take that of the son?"

"I fear you do not know me, sir, and that you may think me more worthy than I am of the high honor you offer me," the lad answered, in a voice almost inaudible from emotion.

"Is that fear your only cause for hesitation?"

"It is, sir, indeed. Oh, how could I hesitate from any other?"

"Then henceforth call me father; and you are to be Bertram and Nina to each other," said the doctor, putting an arm round her, and laying the other over Bertram's shoulders.

The latter seemed almost overwhelmed with joy and gratitude; tears filled his eyes, and he dared not trust his voice to speak.

"Why, what is all this, Clarence?" asked Aunt Lettice, waking, and rubbing her eyes, as she looked at the little group.

"Only that my first experiment in adopting a child has turned out so happily, as to encourage me to repeat it," he answered, smiling, and looking affectionately from one to the other of his *protégés*.

"Oh, I am glad, very glad," exclaimed the old lady, rising and hurrying toward them. "Bertram, Nina, dear children, how happy we shall be all here together. It is almost the same, Clarence, as if your own dear little ones had lived to grow up, and make your home bright and beautiful. Nina bears the name your little girl would have borne; perhaps, if it would gratify you, Bertram would not object to changing his for that of your son."

"Not in the least, if it would give pleasure to my kindest of friends, my benefactor, my father," replied Bertram, pronouncing the last word in tender, yet half-hesitating tones.

"It would gratify me much," said Dr. Monteith, with emotion. "My boy's name was Clarence Ernest — for his

father and mine. We called him Ernest; and henceforth will give that name to you."

Nina still kept up her correspondence with Marchant. A month later she wrote: "Before Ernest came, I thought our dear home was all that could possibly be desired; at least when you were with us. I own we all missed you, more or less, when you went away; but now, we would not know how to do without Ernest; he is so tenderly attentive, affectionate and respectful to Aunt Lettice and father, such a good son to him, such a kind brother to me. Every day of my life I am more and more glad of his coming among us; and often and often I say to myself, 'What a rich girl you are, Nina, with such a father and brother, and the dearest and kindest old auntie in the world, — for Aunt Lettice is like the best of mothers to me; and they all pet me so, that it will be one of the seven wonders if I'm not completely spoiled. I have begun to study tolerably hard now, father acting as my tutor. You know he is a remarkably fine linguist, and Ernest and I are taking lessons of him in French and Italian. In another year we hope to begin German.

"The weather has been too cold for much use of Fear-naught; but we are looking forward to many pleasant rides, and consoling ourselves, in the meanwhile, with frequent sleigh-rides, and a brisk walk every day. Ernest is a good walker, and I think I shall be, when I have fully recovered my strength."

Marchant finished the letter, and threw it aside with an impatient exclamation. "Every other sentence has Ernest in it," he muttered to himself.

"What's the matter, De Vere?" asked his room-mate, looking up from his book; "no bad news, I hope?"

"No; I'm a little out of sorts — that's all. Heigh-ho! what's your opinion of women? fickle, are n't they?"

"I believe it's a common accusation; but I don't know much about it. I'm no ladies' man," replied his chum, indifferently, returning with renewed zeal to his work.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## JEALOUSY, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

THE midsummer holidays brought Marchant de Vere to Wald again. Of late, he had not looked forward to this home-coming with the unalloyed pleasure he experienced in his anticipations of the Christmas holidays. He was jealous of Ernest's influence at Wald, and the regard felt for him by each member of the family there — more especially Nina. But the welcome he received on his arrival, — in no respect inferior to that of former days, — made him heartily ashamed; leaving him not the slightest reason to fear that he had been supplanted in the affections of his uncle or Aunt Lettice. And there was nothing to complain of in Ernest: he took no airs upon himself, and was so thoroughly amiable and kind, that, but for his jealousy in regard to Nina, Marchant would soon have made a bosom friend of him.

Yet this jealousy increased rather than diminished, as the days went on, and the three were almost constantly together; for, though Nina treated Marchant with all the old, cordial familiarity, she had evidently more pleasure in Ernest's society, and a greater respect for his opinions. In truth, he was more congenial to her than Marchant; and there was in him a frankness and perfect openness of disposition, a sweetness of temper and entire freedom from selfishness, which made him a very charming companion to her, and a gentle gravity of manner and wisdom of deportment that caused her to look up to and lean upon him, next to Dr. Monteith; while the frequent lightness and levity of Marchant's speech and behavior prevented the growth of any such feeling toward him. The one was becoming her dearly loved brother, while the other remained only a pleasant friend, whose society was agreeable and entertaining when he chose to make it so.

This was not always ; for his jealousy soon began to show itself in fits of moodiness and irritability, which Nina sometimes laughed at, at others quietly ignored ; for she had penetration enough to divine the cause, and a spice of coquetry in her nature that made her occasionally rather enjoy exciting these unamiable feelings in her boy lover, as she began to perceive that Marchant was, — enjoy it merely for the intoxicating sense of power it gave her.

“Marchant, my dear boy, what is the matter with you of late?” asked Aunt Lettice, coming into the library one morning, and finding him sitting there alone in moody silence, neither reading nor writing, but with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the carpet. “What is the matter?” she repeated, laying her hand on his head, in motherly fashion, and gazing down at him with an expression of sympathy and concern on her kind, sweet face.

“Nothing, Aunt Lettice,—at least nothing worth speaking of,” he answered, with a sigh, as he rose, politely handed her to a seat in a large easy-chair, and then resumed his own.

“Anything must be worth speaking of that troubles you enough to cloud your usually bright face, as it has been clouded for the last few days,” she replied, in the kindest tone. “Suppose you tell your old auntie what it is, and see if she can’t help you,” she added, playfully.

“It is really such a mere trifle that I don’t know why I should let it trouble me in the least,” he answered, gloomily. “It is only that Nina’s behavior, ever since I came home, has been such as to well-nigh convince me of the justice of the oft-repeated assertion that woman is fickle. I beg your pardon, Aunt Lettice : I don’t mean to include you in the condemnatory sentence ; but I’m afraid you are one of the exceptions that prove the rule.”

“Not so, Marchant ; it is a slander upon our sex,” she answered, gravely. “Some of them, no doubt, deserve it ; but *they* are the exceptions ; and I am sure that you wrong Nina in putting her into the number.”

“Pardon me for differing from you, Aunt Lettice; you are not with her as much as I,” he replied, bitterly.

“But what has she done?”

“The evidences of her fickleness,—her preference for a new friend above an old,—are much easier to perceive than to describe; but they have been very patent to me of late.”

“Oh, fie!” exclaimed his old friend. “Would you blame our sweet Nina because she has so large a heart that she can find room in it for all her friends? Ought she not to love her adopted brother?”

“If he was her brother in reality, so that her evident fondness for him could not be mistaken for anything warmer than sisterly regard, I would not complain; but brothers by adoption merely, may come in time to be accepted lovers. And therefore I should think some maidenly reserve advisable for a girl in Nina’s situation.”

“Marchant, you are jealous, horribly jealous; and it is all wrong. You should not indulge yourself in it, or blame Nina for conduct which is only right and proper, for I have never seen anything else in her; nor, I am sure, has either Clarence or Ernest. Yes, you have certainly been looking at the dear girl through the spectacles of the green-eyed monster, Marchant; and I hope you will not allow yourself to do so any more.”

“Jealous, Aunt Lettice! I jealous of Nina!” he exclaimed, with a bitter, scornful laugh. “You surely forget that I come of a high-born, proud, and haughty race,—a race, not one of whom would stoop to mingle his patrician blood with that of one who, with all her marvellous beauty, wit, and talent, can boast of no pedigree; cannot even tell who is her father, or who her mother, or whether she be the child of shame or not. A De Vere to wed with such an one! It is a thing never to be thought of for a moment. Why, my very washerwoman’s daughter may look down upon her! for she at least knows that she comes of honest parentage.”

Marchant had given full reign to his passion, and spoken words for which he hated himself while he uttered them, and



which, the next moment, he would have given anything to recall. And yet he believed Aunt Lettice to have been his only hearer. He little dreamed that another had heard them,—another, whose heart they had pierced like a two-edged sword.

Nina had come tripping lightly down the stairs, her garden-hat swinging on her arm, intending to take a book from the library, and then to seek a favorite seat under a wide-spreading tree at some little distance from the house. But as she drew near the door, the sound of Marchant's voice uttering her name in tones of bitter scorn and contempt, suddenly stayed her footsteps. She had no thought of listening, but, spell-bound with astonishment and indignation, she stood like one in a trance—with blanching cheek and lips, with teeth and hands tightly clenched—till the rapid stream of invective had exhausted itself, and his voice ceased.

Aunt Lettice had never felt so angry and indignant in her life. "Marchant de Vere," she said, with as much severity as could be thrown into the tones of her sweet and gentle voice, "I could not have believed this of you! I am grievously disappointed in you. To think of such a return for all my Clarence's kindness! for you know that Nina is the apple of his eye. And to think you could be so devoid of manliness, could have so little feeling for the dear child herself, as to speak of her with such scorn and contempt; on account, too, of what is to her a most terrible misfortune, and one that has come upon her without any fault of her own. I am ashamed of you, Marchant; more ashamed and grieved than I could have believed it possible you would ever make me feel."

"And I am heartily ashamed of myself, Aunt Lettice," he said, after a pause, in which he had sat before her like a culprit, with downcast face and deeply mortified air. "I could bite my tongue in two for speaking such words. I am glad that no one heard them but you."

"I hope no one did," she replied, still speaking in a tone

of severity that sounded strange from her lips; "and I can hardly help wishing that the day may come when you will sue for my darling's hand, and be rejected. That would serve you right, proud, cruel boy that you have shown yourself to be. You are not worthy of such a priceless treasure."

But Nina did not hear this warm-hearted defence, nor one word of Marchant's repentant reply to the old lady's cutting reproof. As the last sound of his cruel tirade died upon her ear, the spell that bound her to the spot was broken, and with a low, half-stifled, but exceeding bitter cry, she turned and fled out of the house, away, away, through the grounds till she reached a secluded spot, where, protected from the hot July sun by the overhanging branches of the trees, and shut in from all prying eyes by thick shrubbery interwoven by wild, flowering vines, she could feel herself utterly alone. Never since the days of her childhood, no, not even when Mrs. Powell's cold, cruel voice told her, in bitter, scornful accents, of the mystery that shrouded her birth and parentage, had she been conscious of so fearful a tempest raging within her. She flung herself upon the grass, clenching her hands, grinding her teeth, and writhing as if in mortal agony; then came such bitter, bursting sobs as might have moved a heart of stone. For the time she was utterly wretched, all her many blessings forgotten; this one dark speck in her horizon suddenly grown to a thick, black cloud, shutting out all the sunlight that an hour before had flooded her pathway; and, like the prophet of old, she "requested for herself that she might die," might hide herself from the scorn and contempt of the world in the deep, dark grave, — in her bitter anguish, poor child! forgetting how utterly unprepared she was to meet the King of Terrors; how unfit to appear in the presence of a holy God, with a heart so full of evil passions — fierce, murderous anger, malice, and hate. For she felt that it would be a pleasure to crush Marchant de Vere as she would crush a viper that had stung her. She had liked him as a pleasant friend, had even felt for him a certain amount of sisterly affection; but now his

cruel insults had turned all this to gall and wormwood, and at that moment she hated him with a bitter, unrelenting hatred.

She knew it was wrong; she almost shrank back appalled at the glimpse it gave her of the depths of iniquity in her own heart; yet she could not put it away; she did not wish to, and therefore would not ask help of Him who alone can give grace to forgive as we would be forgiven.

“No: she would not forgive; she would be revenged. It might be that she would forgive him afterwards, but she would first make this proud scion of the house of De Vere to know something of the anguish he had inflicted upon her. He should not dream that she had overheard his scornful words; she would put such constraint upon herself that he would never suspect it; and she would throw around him the toils of an enchantress, catch him in the meshes of her net, make him so to adore her that, forgetting or ceasing to care for the stain upon her birth, he would humbly kneel at her feet; and then she would reject him, giving him back contempt for contempt, and scorn for scorn. It might be the work of years, but her resolution should never falter, and she would accomplish her end.”

That hour made of Nina—the hitherto simple-hearted, frank, affectionate girl—that contemptible thing, a coquette; yet heartless only as regarded Marchant de Vere, indifferent to other men, but still loving, tender, and true to her dear adopted father, Ernest, and Aunt Lettice.

The tempest of passion at length spent itself, and, exhausted by its violence, she lay for many minutes, in a half-unconscious state, prone upon the grass.

An hour, two hours had passed; it seemed an age. She must not stay there all day; she would be missed. She made an effort, and, slowly rising, dragged her weary steps back to the house, and creeping up unobserved to her own room, threw herself upon a couch, pressing her hands tightly upon her throbbing temples. The pain in them was terrible; it almost took away her consciousness, and she could scarcely re-

frain from screaming with the added agony as the strokes of the dinner-bell smote sharply upon her ear.

“Where is Nina?” asked Dr. Monteith, as the rest of the family gathered about the table.

No one knew. Ernest had been in the city all the morning, the doctor himself unusually occupied with his professional duties, Marchant in his room, Aunt Lettice busy here and there about the house; and, each supposing that Nina was with the others, they had not missed her till that moment.

Dr. Monteith started up in alarm, and was about to go in search of her, when Aunt Lettice suggested that she was probably in her room; perhaps had come in late, and was not quite dressed when the bell rang.

“Very likely,” he said, sitting down again. “Adolphus, tell Rose to go up and see if Miss Nina is in her room, and able to come down to dinner.”

“Yes, sah,” and the boy vanished.

“Rose has just come from Miss Nina’s room, sah,” he announced, on his return, “and she desired me to tell you that Miss Nina, having a powerful bad headache, don’t desire no dinnah to-day.”

The doctor was in the act of carving a fowl, but at once laid down his knife and fork. “You may take my place here, Ernest,” he said. “Aunt Lettice, excuse me; I must see what ails that child.” And he hastily left the room.

“How he dotes on her,” remarked Aunt Lettice, glancing reproachfully at Marchant, though she had no suspicion of the cause of Nina’s sudden illness. “I think it would break his heart to lose her.”

“You cannot think he loves her better than he did the wife whose loss he survived,” retorted Marchant, coloring deeply.

“No, no, certainly not; but it would bring that back afresh; and he is an older man now.”

A low moan struck painfully upon the doctor’s ear as he noiselessly entered Nina’s boudoir, and drew near the couch

where she was lying. The room was partially darkened, and she lay with her eyes closed ; but he could see that they were swollen with weeping, and that her countenance wore an expression of deep grief and anguish.

“ My poor darling, what is it ? what has troubled you so ? ” he asked tenderly, laying his cool, soft hand upon her forehead as he spoke ; its very touch, joined to the deep sympathy in his voice, seeming to charm away half the pain. The fingers of his other hand were on her pulse, while he counted its beats.

“ Dear father,” she murmured, “ how kind and good you are to me,— a poor outcast, upon whom the very servants may look down with scorn and contempt, because she can show no pedigree, and cannot tell even who her true parents were.”

The words had burnt themselves into her brain, and her tone — in the beginning tender and tremulous with love and grief — was at the last hard and bitter.

He was greatly surprised ; for he could not conjecture where she had heard words of such heartless cruelty applied to her. It roused his indignation.

“ Who, who has dared to say such things either to or of you, my daughter, my darling ? ” he asked, seating himself by her side, and looking searchingly, yet tenderly, into her face.

“ I — I cannot tell,— that is, I do not wish to. I ought not, will not, unless — unless you command me ; and you will not do that, father ? ”

“ I will do nothing to distress you or add to your troubles, my poor child. And perhaps it is as well that I should not know ; for it would not be easy for me to forgive such cruel treatment of my precious little daughter.”

How sweet and consoling were his love and tenderness ! they more than reconciled her to life. She no longer wished to hide her head in the grave ; she would rather live to be the comfort of his declining years, the stay and staff of his old age. She lifted his hand to her lips, and kissed it with pas-

sionate affection, while two tears rolled quickly down her cheeks. "Dear, dear father!" she murmured. "I will never love anybody but you; never go away from you, unless you grow weary of me, and bid me begone."

"And that I shall never do. But I want my darling to be happy while she is with me," he said, fondly; "and I will do all that I can to make her so."

"Ah, you do, you always have; and oh, how happy I should be if—if I could only forget this doubt, this tormenting, disgraceful mystery; but I have tried, oh, so determinately, and I *cannot*. It galls me like a festering sore that will never heal; cover it up as I may, and try to hide it from myself and others, it is always there."

"That is not the wisest way, my darling," he answered, with gentle pity in his tones. "It is far better to look our troubles full in the face, when we will often find them of much less terrible aspect than we had suspected. Or, perhaps, like the lion, who turns and flees when looked full in the eye, they may vanish altogether. A wound would not heal if hastily covered up, without being first examined and properly dressed; and often, on subjecting it to this process, we find it not half so deep and dangerous as we feared. Imagination is a wonderful exaggerator; and so it is that the coward suffers far more than the brave man.

"But we will speak further on this subject at another time. I want you now to take a cup of tea, and try to eat some dinner. Your headache is caused by exhaustion, and food will probably relieve it, at least in a measure; and then a good nap will complete the cure, I trust."

"And your dinner is getting cold all this time, dear father," she said, regretfully. "Please go down to it now, I am quite well enough to be left to take care of myself. You have done me so much good. You seem to have some sort of magnetic influence over me, so that the very touch of your hand charmed half the pain away."

"I am very glad of it," he said; "but I want to see you

entirely relieved. If I go down now, will you promise me to take what I send you, and then to try to sleep for an hour or two?"

"I will do anything my dear father bids me," she answered, again carrying his hand to her lips and pressing a loving kiss upon it.

So he left her; and, going down, sent up Rose with a cup of tea and a slice of toast, and to the anxious inquiries that assailed him on his return to the dining-room merely answered that he had found Nina suffering from a severe nervous headache, which, however, he thought would be relieved by the remedies he had prescribed.

He spent the afternoon at home, and several times stole noiselessly into his daughter's room, each time finding her sleeping quietly. On his last visit, a little while before tea, he found her awake and free from pain, but looking weak and sad.

"Are you not tired lying there?" he asked, stooping to give her a caress, and smiling fondly upon her as he spoke. "Suppose you sit up and lean on me for a little while."

"I would like it," she replied, raising herself to a sitting posture and making room for him on the sofa by her side.

"I think a ride in the cool of the evening would do you good," he said, making her lay her head on his shoulder, while he put his arm around her. "I shall drive you out after tea. Shall I not?"

"Do whatever you like with your own little girl, dear father," she said, with a loving but sad look up into his face.

"Still grieving over the old trouble, dearest?" he asked, passing his fingers through her hair and pushing it back from her forehead. "Do not waste your strength and your happiness in mourning over the inevitable. It has been wisely said that there are two sorts of troubles we should never fret about, — those that we can help, and those that we can't help. This grief of yours cannot be helped at present, though God in his good providence may send relief from it at some future time.

But just now it is the cross He has appointed for you, and the only way to be happy under it is to take it up and bear it patiently. No one is exempt, in this world, from trial of some sort; and, though I would gladly shield you from it if I could, no doubt it is well for you that I lack the power, for He—our kind, wise, heavenly Father—doeth all things well."

"I cannot see how it can be for my good not to be your own, own child!" she cried, with a bitter tone in her voice, and clinging to him with passionate affection; "or not to know it, if I am. O father, what else—what but the tie of the nearest kindred—could make us love one another so very, very dearly?"

"Would that it were so!" he said, with deep emotion, and pressing her closer in his arms. "But, darling, we belong to each other now; and our mutual love may be as fervent as if you were indeed of my own flesh and blood. Let us forget that you are not, and be happy."

"Are you not giving me contradictory advice?" she asked, respectfully. "Did you not, some hours since, bid me not try to forget my festering wound?"

"Not to cover it up without examination, and let it go on festering because you are afraid to learn just how deep and sore it is; but when you have done that, do not keep tearing it open afresh, but let it heal, until even the scars disappear, if that be possible. This is a real trial of yours, and of mine, too. I would have you feel that you are not bearing your burden all alone; but, perhaps, it may not be after all so very dreadful as your excited imagination has been painting it today. I think there are few, if any, beyond our own family circle, who know anything more than that you are my child by adoption (except, of course, those who are possessed of the secret which we would be so glad to learn, and whose interest it is to keep it); and since it does not affect our love for you, why need it make you miserable?"

"I suppose because I am so very proud," she murmured,



hiding her face on his breast. "I have always wanted to be high-born; to be able to boast of patrician blood seems to me worth far more than beauty or wealth; and — and so to be despised and scorned as of meaner extraction than even the child of an honest laborer — oh, father, it is dreadful to me!" And she clung to him with a burst of bitter tears and sobs.

"My poor darling!" he said, soothing her with the tenderest caresses, "I cannot imagine who could have had the heart to say such cruel words in regard to you; but let them pass as the utterance of one whose opinion — as proved by that very heartless speech — is not worth a straw. Pity the folly and malevolence, and try to forgive it. Will you go down to tea?"

"I would rather not."

"Try, to please me," he said, persuasively. "I think it would do you good; you have been moping too long alone in this room. And you will see no one down-stairs but Aunt Lettice, Ernest, and myself. Not even Marchant; for he, poor fellow, had bad news to-day. His sister is very ill, and he was obliged to hurry away by the early afternoon train, without even waiting to bid you good-bye. He left his adieus for you, however."

What a relief it was to her to hear that! to know that she would not meet Marchant de Vere for days or weeks, in which she would have time to school herself to treat him in such a way that he would never suspect her knowledge of those cruel words; never till — her purpose accomplished — she would hurl them back in his teeth, and show him how she hated and despised him.

"I will go down, dear father," she said. "I don't know what I would not undertake to show my love and gratitude to you; and this will be no great task." No one knows or suspects the — the cause of my illness?" she added, inquiringly and with an earnest, entreating look into his face, "and they need not know; you will never tell Aunt Lettice, or any one?"

“No, dearest; there is no occasion: you and I will keep our own secrets. And now I will go down and send Rose to assist you in arranging your hair and dress; and when the tea-bell rings, I will return and give you the support of my arm, for you are still looking weak.”

“Ah, Nina, dear, how is your poor head?” asked Aunt Lettice, entering by one door as Dr. Monteith left by another. “I have been in several times this afternoon, but always, to my joy, found you sleeping. You are better, I hope?” And the look of loving concern, and the gentle, affectionate tones, went straight to Nina’s heart.

“Much better, dear auntie; almost well, in fact,” she answered, putting her arms about Mrs. Barron’s neck, and leaning her head upon her breast.

“Then you will come down to tea, dear; will you?”

“Yes, I have promised father that I will; and here is Rose come to help me dress.”

“How pale you are, Miss Nina!” Rose remarked, with a troubled look. “I wonder what could have give you sich an awful headache?”

“Headaches cannot always be accounted for, Rose,” returned her young mistress.

“We have all been quite concerned about you, dear child,” remarked Aunt Lettice, “and Marchant seemed very loath to leave without saying good-bye; very anxious lest you were going to be ill.”

Nina averted her face, while her lip curled with scorn. But the next moment she replied quite calmly, “Yes; father told me of the bad news that hurried him away. I am sorry his sister is so ill.”

“So am I. But there is the tea-bell, and you are ready just in time.”

They found Ernest waiting in the dining-room. He met Nina with a look of mingled pain and pleasure. “I am very glad you are able to be with us again,” he said; “but sorry to see your cheeks so pale.”

“Never mind; they will recover their bloom to-morrow, I trust,” said the doctor, cheerfully.

It would have been evident to the most casual observer that Nina was the pet and precious treasure of the whole household; and never had she found their love and tender, thoughtful kindness more grateful and sweet than on that evening. She felt that the world was not, after all, a howling wilderness to her; but that, on the contrary, very many roses, beautiful and fragrant, were blossoming in her desert.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### A CHAPTER OF MYSTERIES AND SURPRISES.

**T**HE next morning Nina came down in apparently usual health and spirits; and only a close observer would have noted the shade of unwonted sadness that now and then stole over her beautiful face when the features were at rest. Her father alone saw and grieved over it, for no one else had the least suspicion of the cause of her late attack. He could not bear to see her suffer; it pained him to the very heart; and he exerted himself in many ways to cheer and comfort her.

She was not slow to perceive this, and, filled with gratitude and love, earnestly strove to be happy for his sake. She succeeded in a great measure too; for how could one so fondly loved, and returning that affection so truly, so petted and caressed, so surrounded with luxury and ease, and whose time was so divided between pleasant studies and innocent, healthful amusements, that it never hung heavy on her hands — how could she be very miserable? After the first week, it

was only when alone, and foolishly allowing herself to brood over the one dark speck in her otherwise cloudless sky, that she found she was so.

One warm, bright morning she had wandered out through the shadiest parts of the grounds, and at length established herself in the little wooded, mossy dell, of which we have before spoken as forming a pretty feature in the view from the bow-window of the library. It was a cool, quiet, shady retreat, where the hum of busy life came to her mellowed by distance, and mingled pleasantly with the sighing of the breeze in the tree-tops overhead, the silvery tinkle of the tiny waterfall, and the soft murmur of the streamlet at her feet.

Hers was an active, social temperament, yet there were times when she loved the solitude of this spot; loved to sit here and dream of the past, the present, and the future; often, alas! idly brooding over the dark mystery that so tormented her, and would not be forgotten; dwelling upon Marchant's cruel words, and nursing her desire and determination to punish him for them. She would not stoop to the meanness of betraying him to her father, though she well knew that hardly anything would seem more terrible to the young man than the loss of his uncle's esteem; but with her own hands she would avenge her wrongs. "Was not the seeking of such revenge perfectly excusable and right in a case like this? had he not wounded her in the tenderest spot? treated her with what any woman would feel to be the greatest of indignities, — throwing from him with scorn and contempt the hand he had never so much as asked for, as though it were his to take or reject at his pleasure? His, indeed! she would show him that she was not so easily won. She would teach him that that which he deemed himself casting aside as worthless, or worse than worthless, was in fact a priceless treasure, which he had never won, and never could win, though he put forth his mightiest efforts to obtain it."

She had brought a book with her, but it lay unused in her lap, while, with her elbow on her knee, her cheek resting upon

her hand, and her eyes on the stream, she sat buried in thought. A step startled her, and looking up, whom should she see standing by her side but her old acquaintance, Mary Haggerty, still with a basket upon her arm, as when she had last seen her trudging along the road.

"It's meself, Miss Nina," she said, dropping a curtsy; "an' sure an' it does me ould eyes good to see your purty face again."

Nina smiled faintly. "Why did you leave Millcote, Mary?" she asked.

"Well, ye see, Miss Nina, Mike he got a wife all on a sudden, an' she an' me could n't 'gree no how at all, at all; an' Mike he tuck her part entirely, an' so I jist came away an' tuck up wid the ould trade; for, as I tould Mike, Mary Haggerty's not the woman to stay and work where she can't be mistress."

"And so you are selling cakes and candies again?"

"No, miss: it's not jist exactly the ould trade neither; for it's tapes, an' needles, an' thread, an' sich like notions, that I've got in me basket now," she said, showing them. "An' sure an' would ye buy a thrifle o' me this mornin', Miss Nina? For it's poor I am, an' it's yees that's rich as a princess now, an' me that's glad o' it, an' no mistake; for I never could bear to see how that woman at Millcote abused ye, an' put upon ye, an' ye did the right thing when ye ran away an' left her."

Nina's face flushed deeply. "Mary," she said, "I would rather you would not speak of those times to me or to any one else. They were very unhappy days, and I would like to forget them. Here is a dollar," she added, taking out her purse. "You may give me a couple of papers of pins, and a card of those buttons; they will be useful to the servants. No, I don't want any change; just keep the dollar."

"Blessings on your swate face an' your kind heart, Miss

Nina! an' it's me that 'll never say nothin' more about them bad days, seein' yees don't like to hear it," answered Mary, curtsyng again and again. "May the holy Virgin an' all the saints bless ye, an' make ye always as rich as ye are now, an' take ye straight up to heaven when ye die."

"I am much obliged for your good wishes," said Nina, taking up her book as an intimation that she desired to bring the interview to a close.

But Mary's real errand was not yet done, nor was she easily abashed. Drawing a step nearer, and bending forward to bring her lips close to the ear of her auditor, she asked, in a mysterious whisper, "Have ye seen the gypsies, Miss Nina? Have ye heard o' the wonderful ould fortin-teller, as can read to yees all the secrets o' your birth, an' everything else about ye that 's happened, or that 's goin' to happen; tellin' ye who 'll be your husband, an' the children ye 'll have, an' all?"

"No," said Nina; "nor do I wish to have anything to do with her. I have no faith in fortune-tellers."

"Indade, miss, this one 's no chate; an' it 's jist wonderful what she can do. Sure, an' she tould me secrets consarnin' me own parents an' children, and meself too, the like of which she could n't know otherwise than by manes o' her art. Ye 'd better go an' see for yourself, miss; and jist cross her hand with silver, an' see if Mary Haggerÿ has n't tould ye throe."

"I have no faith in fortune-tellers, as I have already told you," said Nina; "but I would like well enough to see some gypsies. Where are they?"

"Camping in the woods, miss, a mile from here," replied Mary, going on to describe the locality. "It could n't do yees no harm to go there an' jist see 'em, miss," she concluded. "I'm a good friend to yees; an' I'd never advise ye to your hurt; but if there's any secret ye 'd like for to learn, it's this ould gypsy fortin-teller as can show it till ye."

“Why, what is all this nonsense?” asked a voice over their heads, and Ernest, catching hold of a branch, swung himself down the bank and stood beside them.

They were both somewhat startled, and Mary, picking up her basket, which she had set down on the grass while talking, and muttering something about being in haste, dropped another curtsy, and hurried away.

“What was the old hag saying to you, sister?” asked Ernest, taking a seat by Nina’s side.

“She was telling me that there is a gypsy camp in the woods, about a mile from here, and that one of their number—an old woman—is a wonderful fortune-teller,” replied Nina, indifferently.

“And she was urging you to visit them, eh?”

“Yes.”

“You won’t go, surely?”

“Why not? I have never seen a gypsy, and must own to a great curiosity to see what they are like.”

“Don’t go, I beg of you, Nina. I doubt if it would be safe for you; and I feel sure father would not approve of it. But, above all, don’t allow that woman to tell your fortune. It certainly is not right to encourage them in their wicked pretence of being able to look into futurity.”

“You don’t believe they can?”

“No, certainly not; but successful or otherwise, the attempt is wicked, and those who employ a fortune-teller must, I think, have some slight, perhaps half-unconscious, faith in them, else why encourage them by listening to the folly?”

Nina heaved a deep sigh. “Ernest,” she said, in tones of sadness, “I am content to remain ignorant of the future, but oh, such a longing as I have to know the past. I often say to myself, ‘Anything but this torturing doubt concerning my parentage, this dark mystery that I cannot penetrate: the worst of certainties would be far less galling to a nature such as mine.’”

“It is hard for you, I know, my sweet sister, far harder than for me ; but try to bear it patiently. This woman cannot help you to get rid of it, nor would it be right for you to apply to her if she could.”

“Ah, Ernest, now you have gone too far,” she answered, with a mournful smile ; “for who can say that this gypsy wife was not the very person who carried me off, and laid me at the door of the house which was the happy home of my infancy ; and that she does not know all that I am so anxious to learn !”

“True. I had not thought of that ; it may possibly be so ; but yet I do not believe it is, or that she would tell you the truth if she could. And, as I said before, I am certain father would not approve of your going near them, especially alone ; and I could not in conscience accompany you. Promise me that you will not do so without first obtaining his permission.”

She hesitated, but finally, yielding to his importunity, gave the desired promise ; and he well knew that having once given it, she would keep it faithfully.

It often excited Ernest's surprise that she should be so restlessly unhappy about this mystery, as at times she evidently was ; but then he knew nothing of Marchant's cruel words, or of the existence of the dark, malicious stranger who had again and again crossed Nina's path. She had shown herself no more after that encounter in the street of the city, and was now seldom mentioned at Wald. Yet she was never long absent from Nina's thoughts, being always connected in the young girl's mind with the mystery that shrouded her birth.

Nina's intense desire to penetrate this mystery caused her thoughts to dwell frequently, for the next few days, upon Mary Haggerty's communication, and she felt a growing wish to visit the gypsy encampment and test the powers of the old fortune-teller. But her promise not to do so had been given, could not be recalled, and must not be broken.

Late one afternoon, about a week subsequent to Mary's



visit, Nina was slowly pacing back and forth in a bit of woods that formed a part of the grounds of Wald; alone, for a strong, natural aversion to anything like espionage had led her gradually to drop the practice of having some one always within call. She walked with her arms folded and her eyes bent upon the ground, thinking of that upon which her thoughts were but too apt to dwell. A slight rustling near by caused her to pause in her steady, regular tramp, and lift her eyes.

A woman stood close at her side; a form apparently bent with age and infirmity, leaning upon a staff, trembling and tottering. The garb was wild and picturesque; long gray hair floated over her shoulders, and her skinny and wrinkled features were half hidden beneath a broad-brimmed straw-hat of very coarse texture. She spoke in a tremulous voice and with a slightly foreign accent, but her words were clear and distinct. "Fair lady, would you know the secrets of the past, the present, and the future?"

"It is the gypsy sorceress," thought Nina, a strange thrill running through her; but her tone was cold, haughty, and disdainful, as she replied, "Granting that I would, are those secrets in your keeping? You see me now for the first time: what can you know of my past, present, or future?"

"Lady, to me has been imparted the wondrous power to pierce the veil that hides these things from ordinary mortal ken."

She drew nearer to the young girl, seeming to look her through and through with her keen black eyes.

"There is a dark secret you would give much to read," she said, sinking her voice to a low key, but every word reaching the listener's ear; "to me it is clear as the day. A net is spread in your path, and toward it your unwary feet are rapidly tending. Would you be warned in time? would you learn how to avoid the threatened ruin? Cross the hand of the aged sorceress with silver, and let her look upon the lines in your own lily palm."

Nina shuddered involuntarily, and drew back a pace or two.

Those basilisk eyes were casting a spell upon her: she felt rooted to the spot. Then a burning desire seized her—an intense, irrepressible eagerness—to test the woman's powers, to hear what she would say, to risk learning the worst, the very worst that could be told her, rather than longer endure this tormenting doubt and uncertainty. She had heard of wonderful revelations made by fortune-tellers,—predictions strangely verified, secrets revealed, for their knowledge of which no one could account. And after all, she could believe or not, as she chose, what might be told her.

Like lightning, these thoughts flashed through her mind; her hand-sought her purse; it was drawn quickly forth, a shining silver half-dollar hastily passed across the brown, wrinkled hand of the old hag, and dropped into it, and her own small white palm turned up to the gaze of the black, piercing eyes. She had done it all without giving herself an instant to reflect and draw back.

An evil smile flitted over the shrivelled features of the sorceress; a gleam of malicious satisfaction shot from her eyes; but she bent low over the lily hand—so low, that for the moment her face was hidden from Nina's view. A low muttering, that sounded like a form of incantation, came from her lips, followed by words at first almost inaudible, then growing more distinct.

“You have been beset by dangers, robbed of your inheritance; but it may yet be restored to you. Nay, it will not; for you will contemn the counsel of the wise, and continue to eat the bread of dependence.”

Nina's cheek flushed, and her eye flashed angrily. She would have withdrawn her hand, but the sorceress held it fast, while her eyes gazed searchingly into the smooth, open palm.

“The lines are not distinct in their meaning,” she muttered; “but this much they reveal to the eye of her who has the gift of second sight: Beware, fair lady, of a young and handsome face shadowed with chestnut locks and lighted by hazel eyes.

Sorrow more bitter than death will follow, if you heed not my warning."

Nina snatched her hand away, and drawing herself up to her full height, "Begone!" she cried, while her eye flashed with anger and her lip curled with scorn and contempt. "You slander the best and truest of men. Ernest Monteith will never deceive or wound the heart that trusts him. He is my brother, and not a word will I listen to against him. Still less against him who shelters me with a father's loving care, and considers a daughter's love and obedience even more than an equal return; though I feel it to be far less."

"Indeed! and where is the obedience to-day?" laughed the sorceress, mockingly. "Would you have yielded your palm to my inspection, had he stood by your side? And yet you prate of love and obedience, and your whole soul abhors and detests hypocrisy and deceit."

The mocking words, the derisive laugh, sent the crimson tide of shame all over the cheek, the brow, the neck of the beautiful girl, and her eyes fell beneath those of the gypsy. The next instant she raised them, and started with surprise. The form before her was no longer bent and tottering with age; it towered above her, erect and firm as her own, and the fierce black eyes were looking straight into hers.

Nina uttered a cry. "Ah, I know you now!" and springing forward, as the figure was gliding away, caught at her skirt and held it fast with all her might. "No," she cried, "you shall not escape me now; *you shall not!* Tell me, tell me, what do you know of my birth and parentage? and why, why do you haunt me thus? why do you show me such fierce enmity? why so anxious to destroy the happiness of one who has never injured you?"

"Let me go, rash girl," she muttered, with an effort to shake herself free. "My errand is done, and I will not be detained by you. Let me go, I say."

"Never, till you tell me who I am," cried Nina, exerting all her strength to detain her.

The woman bent toward her, and the words came hissing from her lips. "Unhand me, Nancy! 'Where ignorance is bliss, 't is folly to be wise.'"

They sent a cold shiver through Nina's frame; her hands loosened their grasp, and the woman glided away through the trees, while she sunk down on the ground, with her face buried in her hands, her head bowed upon her knees—the words she had just heard, and those others that had made such deep wounds in her proud, sensitive nature, mingling in strange wild confusion in her tortured brain.

"Yes, it is just as he said; they were all true,—those cruel, cruel words," she moaned, rocking herself slowly to and fro. "Oh, dear mamma, why did you take me in and nurse and cherish me so tenderly? Better to have let me die on your doorstep, a little, innocent, unconscious babe, than that I should live to know such shame and wretchedness as this!"

She shed no tears, and at length rose up and walked slowly back to the house. She had regained her health, and with it all her old power of self-control; and that was so entire as to enable her to show a bright, smiling face at the tea-table, and, for the time, resolutely putting aside all unpleasant thoughts, to join with her accustomed spirit and vivacity in the familiar family chat.

"Nina, have you heard anything more of the gypsies in the wood?" asked Ernest, when the meal was about half over.

"I have neither been to look for them nor heard any one speak of them," she answered, evasively; the consciousness of a departure from her usual perfect ingenuousness sending the rich color mantling over cheek and brow.

"What is that you are talking of, children?" asked Dr. Monteith, looking up in surprise. "I have heard nothing of gypsies being in the neighborhood."

"No; and I am pretty certain there has been little or no foundation for such a report," laughed Ernest. "But I overheard an old woman, the other day, telling my sister that

there was a troop of them encamped in a wood near by, and endeavoring to persuade her to visit them, and have her fortune told; assuring her that they had a wonderful sorceress among them."

"I should be extremely sorry to have my daughter encourage anything of that sort," said Dr. Monteith; "but I am confident that Nina has too much good sense to put the least faith in fortune-tellers."

At these words Nina blushed more deeply than before; but she said nothing; and Ernest went on.

"I had occasion to ride through that wood to-day, but saw no trace of gypsies, nor had any of the people living in the immediate neighborhood seen or heard of them; which they certainly would have done in case they had been there; especially as a visit from such a troop is, I believe, a rather rare occurrence in this part of the country."

"But what could have been the woman's motive for such a story?" exclaimed Aunt Lettice.

"Love of talk, I suppose," said Ernest.

"What kind of woman was she?" asked Dr. Monteith, as if struck by a sudden thought, and glancing uneasily at Nina.

"One of those old Irish hags that go about the country carrying a basket of small wares — buttons, pins, et cetera — for sale," replied Ernest.

"The same whom I pointed out to you on the road, one day a good while ago, father, as one who had frequently acted as charwoman at Millcote," said Nina.

"Ah yes; I think I have seen her occasionally since then."

He made no further remark at the time; but later in the evening he called Nina into his private study, and making her take a seat by his side, while he put his arm affectionately about her waist, "Daughter," he said, "this matter which we were discussing at the tea-table makes me a little uneasy in regard to you. I fear that Irish woman may be a confederate of the other whose visits alarmed us for your safety so frequently last fall."

“Why should you think so, father?” she asked.

“Because, otherwise, her effort to get you into that wood seems unaccountable; but supposing her to be in league with the woman who evidently desired to get you away from here last fall, it is easy to conjecture what her motive was. And now I want you to be careful not to fall into any of the traps they may set for you; do not go outside of the grounds, or even to a distant part of them, alone, especially near night-fall.”

“I do not fear them, father.”

“I know you do not, but I fear them for you; and it is my request that, in future, you neither ride nor walk out alone. I know you enjoy doing so, but I cannot feel that it is safe. I would lay my commands upon you to abstain from it, but that I know your affection for me is such that a request is sufficient,” he added, with a tender caress.

“It is, indeed, dear father,” she said: “I consider a request from you as binding as a command, and I will not disobey; though at times I enjoy a solitary walk or ride as keenly as one taken in company with any one but yourself.”

“I will go with you whenever I can,” he said; “and when that is impossible, Ernest will usually be at your service. But if we are both absent, or unavoidably engaged, you must take Adolphus or Jarvis; letting him ride close in your rear.”

Until this day Nina had had no concealments from this kind protector and friend, and conscience urged her to tell him now of her recent interview with her old enemy. But she refused, on the plea that it would but increase his uneasiness, without being of any benefit to him or to herself, and so kept silence.

But the thing preyed upon her mind far more than it would have done had she freely confided all to him or to Ernest. The latter noticed a great change in her; she seemed so restless and unhappy when alone with him, — though before Aunt

Lettice and Dr. Monteith she exerted herself to appear as usual, and was at times, Ernest thought, even unnaturally gay and sprightly. But in vain he questioned her; she either tried to turn it off with a laugh, or gave some evasive answer that did not half satisfy him.

Meanwhile she carefully observed Dr. Monteith's wishes—never going out of sight of the house without a companion, or the attendance of a servant who should always be within call. Yet, with the perverseness of human nature, she longed to be freed from the obligation to submit to be under such constant watch and ward, friendly and protecting though it was. She wanted to come and go at her own sweet will, when and where she would, feeling that no human eye followed her movements.

Several weeks had passed, and she had seen no more of either Mary Haggerty or her mysterious foe, when, one afternoon, seized with a sudden desire for a brisk ride on Fearnaught, she sent Rose to bid Adolphus saddle him and bring him to the door. "And see if Mr. Ernest is in, Rose," she added; "and if he is, ask him if he can ride for an hour with me. If he cannot, or if he is out, Adolphus must go."

Dr. Monteith and Ernest were both out. But Nina was hardly sorry to hear it, as she felt an inclination for a solitary ride; and though she must have an attendant, if he were only a servant, she need not speak to or look at him.

The afternoon was cool for the season; there had been just rain enough in the morning to lay the dust; her horse seemed in fine spirits; and Nina found the exercise so agreeable that she prolonged her ride far beyond the limits she had assigned it, in her own mind, upon starting.

She had made a circuit of several miles, and was returning by a different road from that by which she had gone. The sun had set, but it was still quite light, and the next turn of the road, only a few hundred yards distant, would bring her within sight of home. Just here another road branched off

from the one she was pursuing. It led to the house of an acquaintance, to whom, as she suddenly recollected, she wished to send a message. She reined in her horse, and called to Adolphus, who was following a little in the rear.

"Adolphus," she said, "we are so near home now, that I can certainly do without you the rest of the way; and I want you to do an errand for me. Go over to Mr. Cochran's, and tell Miss Mary that I tried to match that zephyr for her, in the city yesterday, but did not succeed. I had not time to go to more than one or two stores. But I expect to be in again some day this week, and I will try then; unless she prefers to send by some one else."

"Yes'm," replied the boy, galloping off down the side-road, while Nina pursued her way at a brisk canter along the other.

She had nearly reached the turn, when, as she passed a clump of bushes, a man suddenly sprang from behind them and seized her bridle. Quick as thought her whip was raised high in air, and brought down again with all the force she was mistress of, striking him right in the eyes.

He let go with a howl of rage and pain, while at the same instant Fearnaught gave a wild bound forward, and sped along the road like the wind, nor paused, nor slackened his speed until he reached the door of his stable, where he came to so sudden a halt that a less skilful horsewoman than Nina would have been thrown to the ground. But she kept her seat firmly in spite of the shock her nerves had just received.

"There, there, Fearnaught; do credit to your name, sir!" she said, with a perceptible quiver in her voice, stroking and patting him as she spoke. "We are at home all safe and sound."

"Dat you, Miss Nina?" cried Jarvis, stepping from the stable-door. "What! you bin out ridin' so late, and all' lone, too?"

"No, here is Adolphus," she replied, as the boy came dashing into the yard: "he was with me."



“All right den, Miss Nina. I was jes agoin’ for to ask where was Dolph, dat he was n’t awaitin’ on his young mistress,” returned Jarvis, touching his hat respectfully.

“My father has come home, I suppose, Jarvis, or you would n’t be here?” remarked Nina, inquiringly, as he gave her his hand, and she leaped lightly to the ground.

“Yes, miss, and Mr. Marchant too. We fetched him in from the city; and I’ve jes been unharnessin’ ole Sorrel and Kate from de carriage.”

“Truly an unexpected pleasure,” muttered Nina to herself, as she gathered up her riding-skirt and walked quickly to the house.

She went directly to her own apartments, taking a back staircase, to avoid meeting with any of the family.

Rose was waiting to assist her with her toilette.

“Dear me, Miss Nina, what’s the matter?” she cried, in consternation, as her young mistress entered, and sank into a chair trembling violently.

“Hush, hush, Rose! don’t speak so loud,” she said, hastily. “Father may hear you, if he is in his room; and I would not have him alarmed about nothing. I have ridden too fast, and am a little fatigued and excited; but I shall get over it presently.”

“You are as pale as death,” said Rose, looking much distressed; “and I’m expectin’ every minute to hear the teabell ring.”

“I’ll be better in a minute,” said Nina, laying her head back against the chair, and closing her eyes. “But take away that white dress, and bring me the pink barège father likes so well.”

“Mr. Marchant’s here, Miss Nina; and I’ve heard him say time an’ agin that you look so lovely in white; an’ with pink ribbons it would n’t make you look pale.”

“Take it away, and bring me the other!” cried Nina, imperiously. “I don’t dress to please him.”

Rose obeyed, with a sigh. She had long since settled it in her own mind that Miss Nina and Mr. Marchant were made

for each other, and she was anxious that all should go smoothly between them. She did not inquire what ornaments her young mistress would choose to wear, but silently laid out the gold bracelets which had been Marchant's Christmas-gift.

"Put those away!" commanded Nina, the instant her eye fell on them. "I will wear my pearls."

"The bright yellow gold is such a lovely contrast to the pink, Miss Nina," urged Rose; "an' there 's the tea-bell; an' these bein' out, can be put on quicker, you know."

"Get me the pearls, and I will fasten my dress myself while you are doing it," replied her mistress, slipping from under her hands; and Rose had no choice but to obey.

Nina's paleness, and every other sign of agitation, had entirely disappeared during her rapid toilette, and she entered the tea-room looking radiantly lovely. Just in time, too, for the others had been delayed also.

Marchant stepped eagerly forward to greet her. She gave him the tips of her fingers, and, hardly glancing at him, turned to Ernest with some merry remark about her ride.

Marchant frowned, and bit his lip with vexation. "I've been away all these weeks, and she treats me as if we had met yesterday, or perhaps rather more as if we had never met at all before," he muttered to himself, as they took their seats.

"Were you not surprised to see Marchant?" asked Dr. Monteith, with a proud, admiring, affectionate look at his daughter.

"No, sir; for Jarvis had told me he was here," she answered, sipping her tea, with an air of supreme indifference.

"I had hoped to give you an agreeable surprise," said Marchant, in a vexed tone; "but perhaps it will please you better to hear that my stay is to be very short."

"There is plenty of room in the house, and I don't grudge you your share of it," was her cool rejoinder.

Marchant colored deeply, and his countenance expressed extreme annoyance and disgust.

The doctor glanced from one to the other with a puzzled

look, but said nothing ; and Ernest, coming to the rescue, led the conversation to other subjects.

Nina was very gay all the evening — playing the piano, singing, laughing, and talking, scarcely ever looking at Marchant, and not allowing herself a moment to think.

“My darling is very happy,” thought the doctor, as he watched her ; and his caress, as he bade her good-night, was very tender and affectionate, his gaze into her beautiful face full of fatherly pride and admiration.

“You are very merry to-night,” he said, with a smile ; “but what is wrong between you and Marchant ?”

“Oh, nothing,” she answered, with a light laugh ; “but Marchant is jealous of Ernest, and so I like to take him down a little, once in a while, for Ernest is worth two of him ; is n't he ?”

“Ernest is a dear boy ; but I hope you will not wound poor Marchant unnecessarily. Remember he is fatherless and motherless, and depends upon us for much of his happiness.”

For a moment, as Nina turned away and entered her own room, an emotion of pity stirred in her breast ; but the next, her lip curled and her eye flashed with anger and scorn, as she recalled the heartless words she had once heard him speak.

“What if I do wound him,” she said, to herself ; “could I possibly give him half the pain he has given me ? Ah, would that it were in my power : I should not hesitate long.”

Rose was soon dismissed, and Nina, throwing on a dressing-gown over her night-dress, stepped out upon the balcony, tempted by the beauty of the night and feeling it impossible to sleep. She leaned over the balustrade, thinking of the strange adventure of the afternoon, and shuddering at her narrow escape from — she knew not what ; but that the man was a foe was evident enough from his act ; and besides, in the instant that his hand was upon her bridle, she had caught a glimpse of his face — fierce, dark, scowling, with black, malignant eyes, strangely like to those of the mysterious woman who had so often crossed her path. She doubted if it were not

the woman herself in male attire, and sporting a false beard and moustache.

An emotion of gratitude to God that she had been able to defeat the evil designs of the wretch, arose in her heart ; but mingled with it was an uncomfortable consciousness that she had needlessly exposed herself to the danger by sending Adolphus from her before reaching home ; and also a fear that she had, perhaps, inflicted very serious injury upon her enemy — more so than the occasion demanded.

“I may have put out his eyes,” she murmured, half aloud ; “and perhaps, after all, he meant me no great harm, and a blow on his hand might have been sufficient to release my bridle. I wish I had tried it ; and yet, if it had failed —”

She shuddered, started, and leaning farther forward, gazed intently at a large elm-tree that stood at a little distance from that side of the house. Was it only the shadow of the tree lying on the grass, or did she faintly discern the outlines of a dark figure leaning against it? She could not be certain, though she gazed fixedly toward it for several minutes. Then, as a cloud passed over the face of the moon, throwing that part of the grounds into deep shadow for a moment, she was equally uncertain whether the dark figure glided away through the gloom, or whether it was all an illusion of her own vivid and excited imagination.

As it seemed to disappear in the deeper gloom beyond, she drew a long breath, and, turning about, stole quietly in and sought her pillow ; but not to sleep for hours. Should she tell Dr. Monteith of these recent indications of the return of her old enemy to the vicinity, was the question in her mind. She could not quite satisfy her conscience that it was right to conceal it from him ; but the thought of Marchant, and the unpleasant inferences he would be likely to draw from them, determined her to keep silence, at least until his return to college.

“He shall know of nothing of the kind that I can conceal from him,” was her bitter resolve.

He was thinking of her at that very moment, as he paced slowly to and fro in the balcony on the other side of the house, the one on which the windows of the library opened.

In spite of a strong tendency to jealousy, a very liberal share of family pride, and mayhap of some other kinds also, there was still much that was truly noble and generous in the character of Marchant de Vere, and his cheek burned with shame whenever he recalled those hastily-spoken words that had so wounded Nina. He would have given half his fortune never to have spoken them, though he still believed that Aunt Lettice had been his only auditor. True, he had once or twice in the course of the evening questioned with himself if it could be possible that Nina had overheard them; but he had immediately thrust the idea aside, as too terrible to entertain for a moment; deciding that in such a case her manner would certainly have been, not merely indifferent, but icily cold, as he felt that he deserved it should be.

Marchant was already deeply in love. He had struggled against it, but in vain; and could Nina have looked into his heart that night, she might have exulted in the certainty of having already gained the power to torture him almost as cruelly as he had tortured her. How she had done so that night! with her bewitching beauty, her fascinating manners, her wit and vivacity, her sweet smiles bestowed so lavishly upon others, and her utter indifference to him. And that too when he had thought she would be so pleased at his unexpected arrival after weeks of absence. What had become of the joyous smile, the warm clasp of the hand, and the frank, outspoken words of pleasure with which she had been wont to greet him on his return from college? He would have given much for a repetition of them.

It had required all the self-control of which he was master to conceal his torments from her and the other members of the family, nor was he sure he had succeeded in doing so; and too much excited, vexed, and irritated to feel any inclination for rest or sleep, he had come down again, after retir-

ing to his room, and was trying the sedative effect of a solitary promenade in the cool night air.

He had paced back and forth many times, when, on making a turn that brought him facing toward the rear of the building, he was startled by a sudden apparition,—a dark figure gliding swiftly down one of the long alleys that led from the house toward the woods on his right.

With a half-suppressed exclamation of surprise, he sprang down the steps and gave chase. Eagerly, hotly, he pursued the flying phantom, thinking within himself, “It is probably the creature who has so tormented Nina on several occasions, and it would do me good to bring her to the punishment she so richly deserves.”

But a cloud again obscured the face of the moon; the dark shadows of the trees and shrubs also assisted the fugitive; and she disappeared so suddenly and entirely that he began to doubt whether the whole thing had not been an illusion; and as he walked slowly back to the house, he resolved not to mention the circumstance to any one.

Nina’s manner toward him was somewhat more gracious the next morning; she expressed gratification at the news of his sister’s recovery from her severe illness, and spent a half-hour chatting with him with almost the old cordiality and friendliness.

His hopes rose. It could not be possible, he thought, that she had overheard any of those dreadful words of his in reference to her; and Aunt Lettice, he knew, would never repeat them. So who should say that he might not, in time, even teach Nina to prefer him to Ernest. He did not ask himself whether he meant ever to offer her his hand, or whether, otherwise, it were fair and honorable to try to win her heart. All that he thought of was to make himself first in her affections, and know that the prize was his if he chose to take it.

This Nina perceived, and with it she stifled all the protests of conscience against the part she was playing. “He is far

too proud to wed the poor waif who can boast no pedigree—did I not hear him say it?—but he would like to win her love, to amuse himself with it for a time, and then throw it aside as a worthless toy,” she would repeat bitterly to herself; “but I will show him that two can play at that game.”

And hers was a nature to adhere firmly to a resolution once taken. During the few days that Marchant remained at Wald, she alternately charmed and tormented him, till at times he was almost beside himself; and at last he went away altogether in the dark as to the state of her feelings toward him.

He had thought to satisfy himself in regard to them when bidding the final good-bye; but she managed to escape that by riding out at the very hour when she knew he would be leaving, telling no one but Rose and Adolphus of her intentions. The latter she took with her as escort, bidding him keep close behind her; for she had no desire to expose herself to another attack from her unknown enemies.

“My dear, I am so sorry!” was Aunt Lettice’s salutation on her return; “poor Marchant was dreadfully disappointed at not being able to say good-bye to you; rather hurt, too, at your running away, I think; but I told him I was sure you must have forgotten at what hour he had to leave in order to take the train.”

“Did that comfort him, auntie?” asked Nina, with an arch smile. “Was he glad to think that I could forget?”

“No, I’m afraid not,” said the old lady, smiling too, and shaking her head at the wilful beauty; “after I had said it, it occurred to me that such an excuse was not very flattering to his self-love. But why are you so capricious toward him? I am sure you have quite tormented the poor boy of late.”

“Don’t you think he deserves it? What business has he to be so jealous of Ernest, who is worth a dozen of him?”

There was a bitterness in her tone that surprised Mrs. Barron, and startling her with the momentary fear that her darling had heard the words for which she herself had scarcely yet forgiven Marchant, caused her to turn upon her a keen,

searching glance. But all the bitterness of feeling seemed to be already gone, and the fair face was so bright and sweet, that she could not think it possible.

With a slight sigh of relief, she answered, "Perhaps so; but we, who are so faulty ourselves, ought to be very lenient toward others; and Ernest, I am sure, would be the last to wish you to make Marchant unhappy."

In her secret soul, Nina rejoiced greatly in Marchant's departure. She had too much natural kindness of heart to really enjoy giving pain or annoyance; and his absence was a pleasant relief from restraint. Her impulse was ever to treat all with whom she came in contact exactly in accordance with her feelings toward them. She loathed hypocrisy and deceit, and was apt to be far too outspoken for her own interest; and thus her indignant determination to make Marchant bitterly rue his cruel words, kept her, when in his presence, at continual war with herself. Hence the relief afforded by his absence was so great that, for several days after his departure, she was quite light-hearted and happy.

But the other matter pressed more and more heavily upon her mind and conscience: she feared she ought to tell her father, yet at the same time felt an almost invincible repugnance to speaking of it to him, or to any one.

Her natural fearlessness saved her from the nervous trepidation many of her sex would have experienced in like circumstances; but reason told her that it was no longer safe for her to venture to any distance from the house without a protector, or even to be alone in it with open doors and windows; and though the number of her friends and of servants belonging to the establishment made it an easy matter always to have a companion, the restraint imposed by the necessity was extremely irksome to one of her temperament.

There was a good deal of sickness just at that time, and Dr. Monteith was extremely busy; but Ernest accompanied her in almost all her walks and rides: they were seldom seen apart, and were never happier than when together.



They were alone in the library one evening, about a fortnight after Marchant's return to college. Aunt Lettice was in her room, writing letters, and Dr. Monteith had gone out to visit a patient.

Nina had been suffering from an unusually severe headache that afternoon, and, though the pain was now gone, it had left her with unstrung nerves and a feeling of languor, which made a reclining posture the most comfortable. Busied with her own thoughts, she lay on a sofa near one of the windows that looked out upon the balcony, while Ernest, ensconced in an easy-chair on the other side of the room, was deep in a medical work, from which he had not looked up for the last half-hour.

Nina's eye turned toward the window. Was it fancy, or did she really see again that dark, scowling face with its fierce, malignant eyes fixed full upon her? She started, and raised herself to a sitting posture; but if the face had been there, it was gone; and yet, in the deeper gloom beyond, she seemed to see the gleam of the eyes, and faintly to discern the shadowy outlines of the tall figure of that mysterious woman.

For an instant the young girl sat with one hand tightly clinching the back of the sofa, and her breath coming thick and fast, while she strained her eyes through the darkness. Then something came whizzing through the air and fell at her feet, and the gleaming eyes and the shadowy form vanished.

The noise had startled Ernest. "What was that?" he asked, looking at Nina, who at the same instant sprang to her feet, snatched a tiny three-cornered note from the floor, and with one bound was at his side.

"Ernest, Ernest, protect me!" she cried, clinging to his arm, for he had pushed aside his book and risen to meet her. "I—I was never afraid of her before, since I regained my strength, but I am now."

He put his arm about her, for she was trembling violently, and there was a ghastly pallor on her face as she looked up beseechingly into his.

“Nina, dear sister, what is it?” he asked, in great astonishment; for he had never heard of the dark lady. “I will protect you with my life; but what danger threatens you? what has alarmed you so?”

“O Ernest, I am haunted!” she exclaimed, with a convulsive shudder, speaking in tones so low and tremulous that he scarcely caught the words; “I am haunted! a tall, dark woman, with fierce black eyes, oh, so full of anger and hate, has haunted me all my life; and I saw her face at the window a moment since, her evil eyes looking full into mine.”

“Is it possible? Then she must be secured, and a policeman sent for!” he exclaimed, reaching out his hand to lay hold of the bell-rope.

“No, no, it would only frighten poor Aunt Lettice!” cried Nina, preventing him. “The woman is doubtless gone by this time; and even if she is not, the darkness and her black dress would enable her to elude the search of a dozen men; and, as father and Jarvis are both away, you and Adolphus are the only ones at hand at present.”

“Then we can do nothing till father returns; but her visits must be prevented in future. But how is it that I have never heard of her before? Is this the first time you have seen her since I came to Wald?”

“No,” said Nina, going on to give him a full account of the visit of the fortune-teller, the attack of the highwayman, the shadowy figure seen from the balcony that night; and afterward briefly relating the story of her earlier annoyances from the same quarter.

Ernest listened with intense indignation; never had she seen him so excited. “And is father acquainted with all these things?” he asked.

“Not with those that have occurred within the last few weeks,” she answered, coloring deeply; for she read reproof in Ernest’s eyes, and felt that it was deserved.

“You will tell him now?” he said, interrogatively.

“Yes,” she whispered, shuddering again, and hiding her

face on his shoulder; while he drew his arm more closely about her waist, in brotherly fashion, seeking to reassure her and soothe away her fright.

“Ah, what is this?” he asked, catching sight of the note still held tightly in her clinched fingers. “Shall I read it?”

She nodded assent, and taking it from her he tore it open and read aloud.

“Once more I warn you, foolish, obstinate girl, to beware how you form a nearer connection with him whom you falsely call your brother, but who is almost a stranger to you. The writer of this knows more of him than any one else; and could tell of facts in his early history that, were they known to you, would make you shrink back in horror from the very thought of bringing yourself into nearer connection with him; and yet—really unknown to you as he is—you are so constantly seen together that the common report is that you are engaged. Beware! better *death* itself rather than a marriage with him. Heed my warning, if you would spare yourself terrible suffering.”

Ernest grew pale as he read. “You perceive that she warns you against me,” he said, calmly, but sadly, as he refolded the note and laid it on the table; “are you not afraid to lean on me, or to have my arm about your waist?”

“No; but how utterly absurd!” she cried, straightening herself, and stamping her foot with passion; “how shameful to talk to me thus; can I not be allowed the comfort of a brother? Must every man who comes near me be supposed to be my lover? Oh, Ernest, you will not let this separate us?” And the tones of her voice grew piteously beseeching. “I have so wanted a brother to be my companion, protector, and friend, and I thought I had found him in you. Is not our love altogether brother and sister love?”

“As far as I know it is, and it has been very sweet to me,” he answered, with emotion.

“Then do not let this mortal foe of mine deprive me of my brother,” she entreated.

“Ah, Nina, if you can trust me after these base accusations, or rather terrible insinuations,” he said, mournfully; “if you are not afraid of me—”

“No, never, never!” she cried, clinging more closely to him. “Afraid of you, Ernest? and that because my deadly foe warns me against you? If she believed that you would harm me, would she wish to save me from that harm?”

“I had not thought of it in that light, but you really know very little of me—nothing whatever of my past—but what you have learned from myself; and so I cannot thank you enough for your generous trust.”

“You forget that I have seen your daily life for many months. I had learned to hate Christianity before I came to Wald, because I judged of it from the lives of false professors, pharisaical hypocrites, and self-deceivers; but Aunt Lettice and our dear father showed me, by their lovely lives and conversation, the true fine gold of real Christianity, of which the others were but counterfeits; and yet, Ernest, it remained for you to convince me that such lovely consistency of character—such beautiful faith, humility, sweet patience, and charity toward others—might be attained in youth. No one could live with you as long as I have, my brother, and not feel sure that you are what you profess to be—a true disciple of Christ.”

She poured out her words rapidly, almost vehemently, and with half-tearful earnestness; for she loved him with true and tender sisterly affection, and could not bear to see the pained look the cruel insinuations of her foe had brought to his usually serenely peaceful and happy face.

And she was rewarded; for this unexpected testimony to his faithful discipleship toward the Master who held the first place in his heart, and whom it was his most ardent desire to serve and honor before all men, brought the flush of deep joy and thankfulness to his fine, open countenance, and filled his eyes with tears of unfeigned delight.

A quick, firm step approached the door of the room; it

opened, and Dr. Monteith stood before them. His look was one of unfeigned surprise, as he caught sight of them, still standing as they had stood for the last ten minutes.

Ernest colored deeply, and his arm fell from Nina's waist, while at the same instant she sprang forward and threw herself upon her adopted father's breast.

"I have been doing so wrong," were her first words, "I deserve that you should be very angry with me; but I hope you will not." She looked up into his face, the rich color coming and going in hers.

He thought he understood her, and smoothing back her hair caressingly, and glancing at Ernest, "I do not know that it is wrong," he said. "I am surprised, but I cannot blame either of you."

"But Ernest has had no share in my wrong doing," rejoined Nina, smiling and blushing as she perceived his mistake, "it is n't what you think, father dear. Ernest and I love each other only as brother and sister, and that's the only way we ever mean to love; and he had his arm round me only because I have been so terribly frightened to-night, and he wanted to make me feel safe."

"Frightened, my darling?" he cried, putting the other arm about her, and straining her to his breast. "What—what was it? You are not easily alarmed."

"That woman, with the black, malignant eyes," she answered, with a shudder. "But I will tell you all."

He listened in silence, but his arm tightened about her with a convulsive clasp, and his face grew pale and rigid, as she told of the man springing out from his ambuscade and seizing her bridle.

"My brave darling, my poor hunted dove!" he murmured, caressing her fondly as she finished.

"How good and kind you are not to be angry because I did not tell you sooner," she said, with a look of relief.

"But I am much displeased," he replied, yet with grave tenderness, and repeating his caresses; "and to convince you

of it, I forbid you to go even into the grounds, be it ever so short a distance, without a companion close at your side ; or to ride out on horseback without escort, or with other than Ernest or myself."

"Never again, father?" she asked, with a look of dismay.

"Not until the prohibition is removed."

"And shall we not take some measures to catch these wretches, and bring them to justice, sir?" asked Ernest, drawing near, and speaking with the warmth of honest indignation.

"Yes: I will see the chief of police early in the morning," replied the doctor. "I think the woman and her accomplices must have left the neighborhood last fall, just after Nina's last sight of her, and returned within a few weeks ; and I sincerely hope we may be able to catch them before they again make their escape from the vicinity. But if we are not, Nina, I shall blame you for the failure, because you did not sooner inform me of their presence."

"I deserve it, father, I know," she said, humbly ; "but you know I have not been very anxious to have the woman caught."

"No, my poor child ; it seems hard for you either way," he said, compassionately. "But do not fear ; I trust we shall be able to manage the matter in a way that will not bring you before the public."

"Oh, I hope so ! To be made the subject of newspaper paragraphs, and all that, would be terrible to me : I would rather die !" she cried, hiding her face on his breast.

"Do not agitate yourself, my darling ; it shall not be," he said, with exceeding tenderness of tone and manner ; "your father and brother will take care of that. Will we not, Ernest?"

"Indeed, we will," was the prompt rejoinder.

"Ah, Nina," exclaimed the doctor, as if struck by a sudden thought, "are you not now convinced of that Irish woman's complicity with the other one?"

“Yes, father ; though she never before gave me any reason to think her an enemy.”

“She must be looked after, too,” remarked the doctor, significantly.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### A STRANGE WARNING.

**A**N early hour of the next morning found Dr. Monteith closeted with the chief of the police ; and before noon, the head gardener at Wald was provided with two new assistants, who, like the one employed for a few months the previous fall, slept in the house, occupying the same room that had been appropriated to him during his stay. But from that time nothing more was seen or heard of Mary Haggerty, the dark lady, or the highwayman whose eyes so closely resembled hers.

Yet Dr. Monteith relaxed none of his strictness in regard to Nina's out-of-door excursions ; and though, at times, feeling very restive under the restraint, she never asked to be allowed greater liberty, but submitted in silence ; nor loved her father one whit the less for this exercise of his authority.

Now in her seventeenth year, Nina was verging on womanhood ; and she belonged to that class of women who, proudly obstinate and wilful toward those whose natures are antagonistic to their own, yet secretly find a strange pleasure in the voluntary submission of their wills to that of some one of the stronger sex whom they respect and love. And no daughter ever felt for her father a deeper, truer, more devoted filial affection than did Nina for Dr. Monteith.

Her treatment of Marchant de Vere, on his return to Wald for the Christmas holidays, was but a repetition of what it had been in the summer,—now kindly cordial, now indifferent to absolute coldness.

It was very tantalizing, and he grew angry and penitent by turns. But she seemed not to notice his moods; and, struggle as he might, he could not help himself; for the boy-god had got fast hold of his heartstrings, and would not let go.

“Nina, why do you treat me so?” he asked, coming upon her alone in the library, one morning — the first time he had succeeded in finding an opportunity to speak a word to her in private.

“Treat you how?” she asked, in pretended surprise and indignation. “I am not conscious of having been other than polite to you, Mr. de Vere.”

“Now don’t Mr. de Vere me, I beg of you,” he answered, testily; “my name’s Marchant to all home folks; and do be reasonable and ingenuous, and don’t pretend that you haven’t been as changeable as a weather-cock in your manner toward me during the week I have spent at home, to say nothing of what you were on my last visit.”

“You are highly complimentary, and very flattering in your comparisons,” she said, coolly counting the stitches in her embroidery.

He took a turn or two across the room, to give himself time to recover his temper, and coming back to her side, asked abruptly, “Will you ride with me this morning, Nina? It is mild enough to make a brisk ride on horseback quite enjoyable, and the horses need exercise.”

“If you are only anxious to exercise the horses, some other companion will do quite as well as I,” she answered, without lifting her eyes from her work.

“Pshaw! you are determined to misunderstand me,” he cried, impatiently. “Will you, or will you not go?”

“Not with you alone.”

“And why not? Are you afraid of me?”

“Afraid of you?”

The tone, the look, spoke so much contempt, that it took half a dozen turns across the room to cool down his indignation sufficiently to enable him to venture to address her again.



Then, with a great, but not entirely successful effort to keep his voice from betraying the agitation of his feelings, he spoke again.

“If you are not afraid of me, why do you stipulate for other company than mine?”

“Because father has forbidden me to ride out without the escort of either himself or Ernest.”

Astonishment kept him silent for a moment; then he said, “But it is perfectly absurd to suppose that uncle would not trust you to my care quite as soon as to Ernest’s. He is in his office now, I think, and I will go and ask him—.”

“You need not: if I go, I prefer to have one of them along.”

“O Nina, how you torment me!”

“Then why do you seek my society?”

“For the same reason that the moth flies to the candle, I suppose: he cannot keep away, though he knows he shall singe his wings, and smart for it.”

“Very well; then the candle is not to blame, since its nature is to burn; and it cannot help singeing the wings of such moths as you,” she answered, demurely.

“Nina,” said Ernest, coming in at that moment, “Aunt Lettice wishes to speak to you. You will find her in the conservatory.”

“Yes; I will go to her at once,” she said, rising, and hastening from the room.

The moment the door was closed on her, Marchant poured out all his vexation to Ernest, winding up with wondering what could have led his uncle to lay so strange an injunction upon Nina.

“It was at the time of our last alarm from my sister’s mysterious enemy,” said Ernest. “I think we wrote you an account of it, and of —. No, I forget; she requested that you should not be told. I did not understand why, but father thought it right to let her have her own way in the matter.”

Marchant reddened violently. “It is just as incomprehen-

sible as the rest of her treatment of me," he said, angrily. "I don't see why such matters are to be kept secret from me any more than from the rest of the family. But was it when she was out on horseback the woman came upon her?"

"No,"—Ernest hesitated, not liking to tell what Nina had chosen to conceal; "but we—father, Aunt Lettice, and I—did not feel that she could be safe anywhere out of the house, unless one or the other of us could be with her. But of course you are quite as good a protector as I, and your name was not mentioned only because you were not here at the time. No doubt you have but to speak to father to get permission to take her out alone. Shall I ask —"

"No, no, thank you, Ernest," interrupted Marchant, half angrily. "I do not wish it, since she has informed that she does not. You will go with us, I hope?"

Ernest looked uncomfortable. "I fear I shall be quite *de trop*. You do not want me, Marchant?"

"Yes, I do, Ernest. I would not ride alone with her after what she has said. I doubt if she would not prefer to ride with you alone."

Marchant's tone was gloomy and displeased.

"Oh, no; I think not," said Ernest. "I am sure she likes you, Marchant, as of course we all do; but she also likes to tease you a little, perhaps merely to test her power to do so,—and you are not wise to let her see that she can."

"Do you think so, Ernest? that it is mere love of teasing—not real dislike to me?" he asked, brightening.

"I do, certainly. I can see no reason why she should not like you. I find you a very pleasant fellow —"

"Except when I allow her teasing to run away with my good humor, eh?" Marchant put in, with a slight laugh, as Ernest paused, without finishing his sentence. "I own it does make a bear of me. But you will ride with us? I shall take it quite ill, if you don't. Shall I order the horses? or will you?"

"Just as you please."

“Well, I will do so then; but what hour shall I say?” he asked, with his hand on the bell-rope.

“Whatever suits Nina will suit me,” said Ernest; “and here she comes to answer for herself. For what hour shall we order the horses, sister? The decision rests with you.”

“Let it be at once, then,” she said, “that we may have our ride in the warmest part of the day, and yet be able to return in season for dinner. It is half-past twelve now,” she added, looking at her watch: “I will go and dress. You are going with us, Ernest?”

“Yes; if you want me,” he said, with a smile.

“Of course we do. Marchant and I have become so quarrelsome of late, that we need some one to keep the peace between us.” And she danced gayly from the room.

Ernest ran after her, while Marchant stayed behind to give the order to the servant, who now appeared in answer to his ring.

“Nina,” said Ernest, detaining her as she reached the door of her dressing-room, “let me say a word to you.”

“As many as you please, brother mine,” she answered, smiling up into his face. “Only don’t scold me; for you know I never could bear to be scolded.”

“Ah, what a guilty conscience,” he said, playfully; “you feel that you deserve it, eh? But did I ever make it my business to reprove you?”

“No, never; but I feel and acknowledge that you have a brother’s right to speak your mind freely to me. So, now, what is it?”

“Only that I want to ask a favor of you.”

“Well, I will not refuse, if it is in my power to grant it.”

“There; you have pledged your word, and I know you will keep it. I want you to be a little kind to Marchant, and let the poor fellow enjoy his ride.”

She considered a moment, with thoughtful face and down-cast eyes, while he stood admiring the changing color on her fair cheek.

“Well, I promise; to please you,” she said, lifting her eyes to his face, with a merry, mischievous look; “but, take notice, I pledge myself only for the ride.”

Ernest smiled, and shook his head. “Ah, I’m afraid I shall have to change the good girl, just now on the tip of my tongue, to bad, naughty girl. How you love to tease that poor boy!”

“Yes, I do; and my brother should not try to deprive me of my sport. Now run away and let me dress.”

She came down looking radiantly beautiful, in a new and very becoming hat and habit. Marchant stepped eagerly forward to assist her to mount, and was agreeably surprised at the graciousness with which his services were accepted. Not in all the days of their acquaintance had she smiled more brightly upon him; nor did her mood change during the ride. She was very gay, lively, and chatty, and lavished more of her favor upon Marchant than upon her brother, who rode on her other side almost in silence, merely putting in a word now and then, in a quiet, unobtrusive way.

“Good girl,” he whispered, meeting her in the hall, as she came down dressed for dinner; “only behave as amiably through the afternoon and evening, and I will bring you a stick of candy the very next time I go into the city.”

“It’s a bargain,” she answered, laughing; “only it must be a whole pound, and of the very best vanilla cream.”

“Very well: it will be all in the way of business, as I’m a doctor; and if you get the dyspepsia, you must send for me.”

Marchant had no further cause for complaint that day, for the moth did not once singe his wings, though continually hovering about the candle. Marchant was very fond of music,—himself a fine performer on both organ and piano,—and he had been very anxious to learn to what proficiency Nina had attained in that delightful art during his absence; but she had persistently refused to play or sing for him. This evening, however, finding her in so favorable a mood, he ventured

again to ask her to do so, and to his surprise and gratification she at once complied with his request.

He was still more surprised and delighted with the manner of her performance. She had a great deal of talent, and a magnificent soprano voice—full, rich, and round in tone, and of remarkable compass; and with a double motive for exertion—the desire to please Dr. Monteith, and a firm determination to leave no stone unturned to insure her complete conquest of Marchant—she had labored very diligently, and made astonishing progress.

Marchant was very warm in his praises and congratulations; and the conviction that he was a competent judge, rendered them extremely gratifying to Nina; and so for several days the two continued to behave quite amicably toward each other.

But it did not suit Nina's tactics to allow Marchant to go away feeling quite certain that she really cared for him. Therefore, during the last day or two of his stay, she resumed her provokingly indifferent manner; and when he bade her good-bye, hardly permitted him to touch her hand.

She had long since ceased to write to him, always finding some excuse for leaving the correspondence to the other members of the family, even when the letter to be answered had been addressed to her. He had, on this visit, complained bitterly of her neglect, and several times tried to persuade her to promise to do better; but she refused to be bound.

He made the last attempt as he held out his hand in parting. "Now, Nina, you will write to me, at least occasionally; won't you?"

"Letter-writing is not my forte, Mr. de Vere; and I shall have too much else to do," she answered, in an icy tone, drawing herself up, and barely touching his offered hand with the tips of her fingers.

An angry flush suffused his face; he turned about, without another word, and went away in a rage—with her, for her coldness toward him, and with himself for being so madly

in love that her indifference pained him as nothing else could ; while her kindness to Ernest was almost equally torturing.

During the remainder of that winter, and the following spring, Nina and Ernest were constantly to be seen together. He had begun to practise a little among the poor ; and she often went with him to their houses, carrying a basket of delicacies to tempt the failing appetites, and articles of needed clothing, made by Aunt Lettice and herself. The ability to give was to her, as well as to the rest of the family at Wald, one of the greatest luxuries of wealth.

“Where are you going, Ernest?” asked Nina, one beautiful May morning, as Adolphus drove up to the side entrance in the gig usually appropriated to her brother's use.

“A few miles down the road to visit one or two patients. Come, get your hat and go with me. Nobody who is able to get out should stay in-doors such a day as this.”

“Of course I'll go. I'm always ready at a moment's warning,” she replied, snatching a coquettish little garden-hat from the rack in the hall, tying it on, and taking a pair of gloves from her pocket.

“You must have a shawl,” said Ernest, as he handed her into the gig ; “there will be a breeze in driving. Adolphus, run up and get one from Rose.”

They had made a circuit of several miles, and were travelling toward home again, when Ernest turned out of the road with the evident intention of stopping at a little frame dwelling, with a small yard in front and quite a large garden in the rear.

“Who lives here?” asked Nina.

“A gardener named Murphy. He is suffering from a felon, and I promised to call and lance it this morning.”

“Oh, dear ! if you are going to do any such horrid thing as that, I'll stay in the gig. How glad I am that I am not a doctor !”

“Well, you may hold the reins,” he said, handing them to her, and springing out.

“Ernest,” she called after him, “please send me a glass of water. I’m excessively thirsty.”

He nodded assent, and went on into the house, Murphy himself meeting him at the door, which stood wide open.

“Och, sir, but I’m glad you’ve come. The pain’s jist awful! and it’s niver a wink o’ sleep I got the night.”

“Ah, yes; these felons are very painful things,” replied Ernest, in a sympathizing tone, as he began, with gentle touch, to uncover and examine the diseased member.

“The lady who is with me is very thirsty,” he said, glancing up from his work. “Could I get some one to carry her a glass of water?”

“Sure, sir, an’ it’s a thrifle of a favor you’re askin’,” replied the man’s wife, who was kneading bread on the farther side of the room; “but I’ve got me hands in the dough, an’ the childer is niver about when they’re wanted. Mother, will you take the lady a drink?”

An old woman, who sat knitting in a corner, silently laid down her work at these words, rose, went to a cupboard, and taking from it a tumbler of coarse, green glass, filled it at the pump behind the house, and carried it to Nina.

The young girl noticed that the wrinkled face was deadly pale, while the hand that put the tumbler into hers trembled like an aspen-leaf.

“I fear you are ill,” she said, in a gently compassionate tone, as she returned the glass. “I am sorry you should have been troubled to wait upon me.”

“No, I am not ill, dear, kind lady, though me ould cheek has lost its roses, an’ me ould hand trimbles wid the years as has put snow on me hair,” she answered, in a tremulous voice, steadying herself against the wheel, while she fixed her eyes, with an earnest, admiring gaze, upon the beautiful and blooming face before her. “Och, lady, but yere fair an’

comely, an' bloomin' as a fresh-blown rose. Lady, don't ye be angered wid an ould woman. It's me, Judy Flanagan, as wishes ye well wid all me heart; an' it's me as has got the gift o' second-sight, an' can tell ye thrue what's afore yees if yees marries that young doctor in the house yonder. An' I've come out to warn ye; for, as I laid wide awake on me bed last night, I saw your beautiful face as plain as I see it now, an' ye was the young doctor's bride; an' ye was a tearin' yere lovely hair wid grief, and yere swate, beautiful face was full, full o' woe, an' all wet wid bitter tears. Oh, lady, swate, purty lady, be warned by me, an' niver let um come nigher to yees than he is now!"

Had she really seen her beautiful listener on the brink of ruin, and ready to run headlong to destruction, her tone and manner could not have been more eagerly beseeching, more full of apparently terrified entreaty; and the expression of her countenance, the grasp of her hand, as, in her earnestness, she laid hold of Nina's arm, spoke as powerfully as the tones of her trembling voice.

She had poured out her words rapidly, as we do under strong excitement, and for an instant Nina seemed almost stunned with astonishment at so strange and unexpected an address; then her cheek flushed crimson, and her eye flashed with anger and scorn.

"How dare you speak so to me?" she cried. "I will not listen to such words against my brother; for that is what he is to me; and your vaunted second-sight is all a lying pretence. But no woman whom he shall honor by making her his bride, will ever have reason to regret her choice, if she be at all worthy of him. And truly this abuse of him is a grateful return for his kindness to your son."

"I did n't mane no abuse o' him, lady," replied Judy, humbly, and dropping a curtsy as she spoke; "in me vision I saw him as miserable as yersilf, an' it was n't that neither of yees was unkind or bad till the other; it was jist the fates as was against yere union."



"There, go; he is coming," said Nina, waving her hand; and Judy turned and tottered back to the house, passing Ernest with averted face.

"What is the matter, sister? what has that old creature been saying to you?" he asked, looking with surprise at Nina's flushed cheeks and eyes half filled with angry tears.

"Nothing of any importance, Ernest; except that every old woman seems to feel herself privileged to meddle in my affairs," she answered, turning away her face.

"Rather impertinent, I should say; especially in a first interview," he said, as he seated himself by her side and took the reins from her hand.

He asked no further questions, and Nina did not think it necessary to repeat Judy's strange words; but she pondered them for days afterward, greatly wondering what could have been the old woman's motive for speaking them.

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## CHAPTER XL.

### A FEARFUL ALTERNATIVE.

**T**HIS was Marchant's last year in college, and for weeks before the end of the term his letters were full of urgent entreaties that they would all come to the Commencement. He was anxious for their presence, as he hoped to distinguish himself; for he had been working very hard, and felt almost sure of graduating with high honors, if not the highest. Also, he had been chosen to pronounce the valedictory.

Dr. Monteith could not leave just at that time; but the young people were anxious to go, and Aunt Lettice kindly consented to accompany them; knowing that the doctor would hardly feel that Nina was safe from her secret foes unless she had a female friend with her.

Marchant was overjoyed at their arrival, for he felt that his hardy-won laurels would be doubled in value if Nina saw him crowned with them,—to say nothing of Aunt Lettice and Ernest, whose good opinion he esteemed very highly.

He acquitted himself well, winning several of the highest prizes, and moving the audience to tears with the pathos of his valedictory.

The maternal heart of Aunt Lettice was full to overflowing with joy and pride ; but Nina listened coldly, and there was a half-scornful curl on her lip, as an admiring whisper from some other lady auditor now and then reached her ear. She heard him called “so interesting, so handsome, so talented,” by one fair, aristocratic-looking young lady ; while another responded, “And of such good family, too, and quite wealthy I understand : one of the best matches in the country, I’m told.”

That last sentence, recalling to Nina’s mind those fatal words of his which had turned her friendship for him into bitter hostility and dislike, sent the hot blood in a crimson tide to her cheek and brow ; but it died away the next instant, leaving her paler than her wont.

The exercises were over, the audience dispersing ; and presently Marchant came toward them, pushing his way through the crowd, flushed with victory and expecting to receive their warm congratulations.

He was not disappointed, so far as Aunt Lettice was concerned. “My dear boy, I am proud of you !” she cried, taking his hand and pressing it affectionately in both of hers. “How your dear mother would have enjoyed your success ! I am sure you have not misimproved your opportunities ; and I hope there is a long life of honor and usefulness just opening before you.”

“Thank you, dear Aunt Lettice, my second mother,” he answered, with emotion ; then turned to Nina.

But her face was averted. She was looking intently in the

opposite direction. His eye followed hers, and he saw Ernest pressing through the crowd in company with two others of the graduates — young men who, with warm praises of Nina's beauty, had coupled a request for an introduction. He had put them off with some trifling excuse, fearing their rivalry; and he felt an emotion of anger toward Ernest for his evident intention of assisting them to an acquaintance with his beautiful sister.

"Nina," said Aunt Lettice, gently touching the young girl's arm, "here is Marchant. Have you no congratulations to offer him?"

"Ah, I will leave that to you, Aunt Lettice; you can do it so much better than I," she replied, giving Marchant a little nod and a languid smile.

He flushed angrily. "I see you do not care for my success," he said, gloomily; "probably, you would have preferred to see me fail."

"Oh, no," she answered, indifferently; "father seemed anxious that you should do honor to your family, and I always care to see him pleased."

As she spoke she turned toward Ernest, who was now close on her other side, and her manner, as he introduced his friends, was full of sweetness and grace.

Marchant bit his lip and walked away, more angry with her than ever before. "She's a heartless coquette!" he muttered — "she was just as sweet and gracious to me this morning, and now she treats me as if I were not worth a thought."

"Nina, dear, I was sorry you showed so little sympathy for poor Marchant," was the gentle remonstrance of Aunt Lettice, when at length they found themselves alone in the parlor of their hotel. "I could see that he was quite hurt by your apparent indifference."

"Ah, was he? Well, please don't scold me," Nina answered, coaxingly, putting her arm round her old friend's neck and kissing her cheek. "Marchant has plenty of others

— plenty of pretty girls — to sympathize with him, and rejoice in his success. But see, Ernest is coming to take us to the cars.”

They found Dr. Monteith himself and his large, roomy, family carriage waiting for them at the Philadelphia depôt.

The doctor's kind, interested inquiries and unfeigned, fatherly delight in Marchant's success restored the young man to his usual good humor and cheerfulness; and Nina being on her best behavior now in her father's presence, there was no jarring between them; nothing to disturb the enjoyment of the little party as they drove rapidly homeward in the beautiful June twilight.

“I have something to tell you all,” remarked the doctor, breaking a slight pause in the conversation.

All eyes were instantly turned upon him, and every ear was ready to hear.

“I have received a new member into our family,” he continued, “a delicate, fragile-looking little lady—about your age, Nina, I should judge,” and he drew her closer to his side as he spoke — “who came to me the day you left, asking for medical advice. She is an orphan, of small means, I imagine, and almost friendless; suffering, too, from a terrible inward disease, which was the cause of her coming to me. I have asked her to stay at Wald while she is under treatment, and as much longer as she likes, and she has accepted my invitation.”

“Poor, dear child!” exclaimed Aunt Lettice, wiping away a tear. “I hope you will be able to relieve her, Clarence. Does she suffer much? Is her disease incurable?”

“She suffers terribly, and her sufferings are likely to increase,” said the doctor, with emotion; “but the other question, Aunt Lettice, I am not yet prepared to answer.”

“Is it a mortal disease, father?” whispered Nina, looking up into his face with glistening eyes.

“Mortal, unless relieved, darling,” he answered; “and I hope you will do what you can to comfort my poor patient, and help her to forget her pains.”

“Indeed I will! Is she confined to bed?”

“No, not now; and she does not even care to retire very early, as pain prevents her from sleeping until nature is quite worn out; so I think you will see her to-night.”

“You have not told us her name, father,” remarked Ernest.

“Nor whether she is pretty or plain,” added Marchant, with a glance at Nina.

“Her name,” said the doctor, “is Lily Donaldson. Very appropriate, I think, for she is fair and fragile as the flower itself. Of her beauty, you must judge for yourselves. It is of the extremely delicate kind, and to me there is something touchingly interesting and sweet in her fair, spirituelle face.”

“Oh, I am eager to see her, and I feel sure I shall love her dearly,” cried Nina.

As she spoke, the carriage turned into the grounds of Wald, and presently after it drew up before the door.

“Oh, Miss Nina, but I’m right down glad to see you home again!” exclaimed Rose, meeting her young mistress in the hall. “’Pears like you’d been gone more’n a month. Supper’s just ready to set on the table, but I knowed you’d want to wash off the dust, an’ change your travellin’ dress for some-thin’ cooler; an’ I’ve laid out everything ready,” she went on, following Nina as she tripped lightly up the stairs, and into her own room.

“Yes, that was right; and now we must make quick work, Rose,” Nina said, throwing off her hat and shaking out her curls. “There won’t be time to brush these over; I think they will do; but I must get rid of the dust and cinders, and put on that pretty pink and white grenadine. You must have worked quite hard to get it finished.”

“Yes, Miss Nina, so I did,” said Rose, delighted to find her industry duly appreciated. “But oh, miss, have you heard about the new young lady?”

“Father’s new patient? Yes; what does she look like, Rose?”

“For all the world just like one o’ them great white lilies

you set such store by, Miss Nina. If I'd never seen you, miss, I'd have said this young lady was the prettiest creetur I ever laid eyes onto."

"Oh, you make me so impatient to see her. Does she seem to suffer much, Rose?"

"Yes'm: she's as patient as a lamb; but there's been times I've seed a look on her face as made me think she was a sufferin' more'n tongue could tell."

Nina hurried through her toilette, and hastening down-stairs, found her father in the hall.

He took her hand and, drawing her to the sitting-room door, whispered, "Look! is she not a vision of loveliness?"

A small, sylph-like figure reclined in an easy-chair by the centre-table. Her complexion was exquisitely fair and delicate, with the faintest tinge of color on the softly-rounded cheek and chin; the features were faultless, the lips ruby red, and her hair lay like waves of molten gold along the smooth white forehead; the delicately-pencilled brows, and the long, heavy, silken lashes, now resting on her cheek—for her eyes were closed—were of a somewhat darker hue. The face was without blemish, save an expression of pain that slightly contracted the brows, and gave to the whole countenance a touching look of suffering, patiently and uncomplainingly endured. She was alone, and evidently entirely unconscious of their observation.

"Oh, she is!" cried Nina, eagerly, but in a tone scarcely above her breath.

"Wait till you have seen her eyes; they are the chief charm of her face," said Dr. Monteith. "Come, I must make you acquainted."

He led her forward, and hearing their approaching footsteps, the lady opened her eyes, and looked at the doctor with a sweet smile, that, for the moment, banished the look of pain that marred her beauty.

"Miss Donaldson," he said, "this is my daughter, of whom I have told you. Nina, my dear, I hope you two will be fast friends."

Nina looked into the large, liquid blue eyes, now turned questioningly upon her, and in her warm, impulsive way suddenly bent down, and catching the fairy-like figure to her bosom, pressed a passionate kiss on her lips, crying out, "Oh, you poor, dear, beautiful darling! I am sure I shall love you with all my heart."

"Oh, how very kind in you to say it," murmured the fair stranger, with glad tears shining in her eyes, as she returned the embrace,—but in gentler and more timid fashion,—while Dr. Monteith looked on, well pleased.

"I feel as if I had found a mother and sister," she said, addressing him; "that dear old lady, who tells me to call her Aunt Lettice, has been here talking to me, and comforting me, so much as my own dear mother might."

"She will be a mother to you, my dear," he said. "But come, now, there is the tea-bell; let me give you my other arm, and help you out to the dining-room."

The young men were not less struck with Lily's beauty than Nina had been: it was of a kind that seemed to draw all hearts toward her, melting them to tenderness like a strain of sweet, melancholy music. There was no self-pity in her face, but a look of heavenly resignation that could give strength to endure unto the end. Her voice was low and very sweet; and she joined readily and intelligently in the conversation, evidently taking an interest in what was said, yet seemed to prefer to be a listener. She accompanied the others to the parlor, on rising from the table, and remained there with them for an hour or more.

Marchant tried to excite Nina to jealousy by paying court to the new-comer; but he received no encouragement from Lily, and it was plain that Nina did not care in the least for his desertion; perceiving which, he presently gave up the attempt, and betook himself to the organ in the library.

Dr. Monteith—contrary to his usual custom—went out again in the evening. As he rose to go, Lily turned her eyes upon him, with a half-questioning, half-beseeking look. See-

ing it, he went to her, leaned over, and said a few words in a tone so low that they reached no ear but hers. Then bidding her good-night, and advising her to retire soon, he left the room.

Ernest and Nina were both watching her furtively, but with deep interest. Her color came and went rapidly; she breathed short and hard, like one under great excitement, and an expression of terror and despair rested for a single instant upon her pale features; then her small white hands were clasped convulsively together; there was one swift look upward, and the peaceful, calm, resigned expression came back to her face, and her hands lay quietly in her lap.

“I think you are weary,” said Ernest, coming to her side; “would you not like to retire?”

“Thank you, doctor, I would,” she answered, in her sweet, gentle tones.

“Then let me give you my arm and assist you to your room,” he said; and she took it, with another murmured “Thank you.”

Nina rose eagerly to offer her assistance, but, at a sign from Ernest, resumed her seat again.

“Dear lady,” he said, when, having conducted Lily to the room assigned to her, — the same that Nina had occupied on her first coming to Wald, — and seated her in a large easy-chair, he was about to leave her: “Let these sweet words be for your comfort and consolation, your stay and support this night: ‘When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.’”

“Oh, thank you!” she said, in her low, musical tones, while her lip trembled and tears glistened in the sweet, sad eyes she lifted to his face; “they are just what I need. My spirit has been fainting within me; but when my heart was overwhelmed, He led me to the Rock that is higher than I, and under its shadow I find rest.”



“Yes,” he said, “He is as ‘the shadow of a great rock in a weary land,’ nor shall his promise ever fail that ‘as thy days, so shall thy strength be.’ Would you like some assistance, Miss Donaldson? My sister, I know, would be glad to give it; or, if more agreeable to you, I will summon a servant.”

“No, thank you,” she answered, gratefully. “I shall give trouble enough, by-and-by; but now I can help myself pretty well. And besides, I would be alone to-night—alone with Him.” Her lip quivered again, and her voice trembled slightly.

“Ah, I understand the feeling,” he said, deeply touched, and taking her hand in his for a moment, as he looked down pityingly into the fair face, so full of sweet, sad patience and resignation. “I know that none other can comfort and help in sore trouble as He can. May the everlasting arms be underneath and around you this night, and—to-morrow.”

“Oh, yes, to-morrow,” she repeated, with a slight shudder. “You know, then?”

“Yes, something; what your trial is—what *may* be the result.”

“Oh, pray for me then!” she said, clasping her hands together with a gesture and look of piteous entreaty; “pray that I may be ready for either.”

“I will, I will. But I must bid you good-night; you have need of rest and sleep. Have you no feeling of timidity about passing the night here alone? Shall I not send a servant to sleep on the couch here, or in the next room, to be at hand if you want anything?”

“No, thank you. I shall not want anything, and I have no feeling of timidity; for the Lord is my keeper, and ‘He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.’”

“True; and He will never forsake those who thus trust in him. Try, my poor friend, to lay your burden at His feet, and leave it there. Good-night.” And he went softly from the room.

“Why would you not let me go with her, Ernest?” asked Nina, looking up from a book, as her brother re-entered the parlor where he had left her.

“Because I thought — and it seems rightly, for she has told me so — that she would prefer to be alone.”

There was emotion in his tone, and he averted his face as he spoke, and walking to the window, stood looking out upon the moonlit lawn and shrubbery.

Nina rose and went to his side. “What is the matter, brother?” she asked, laying her hand on his arm.

“I am thinking of her.”

“Of her, Miss Donaldson? Ah, is she not lovely?”

“Very; and, oh, Nina, there is a truly heroic spirit enshrined in that fragile form.”

“What is it, Ernest? do tell me. Why did she look so terrified, for an instant, when father spoke those few parting words? I saw it, and so I am sure did you, though it was but for an instant, and such a sweet, patient, heavenly expression immediately took its place.”

“Yes; and I understood it, though you did not. Father had been telling me something of her case — I being a physician, you know — not exactly what her disease is, but this much, which I may repeat to you. Yesterday morning he told her — how tenderly you and I can guess, but no amount of tenderness or of mere human sympathy could greatly soften such a terrible announcement — that her only hope of life lay in submission to a difficult and dangerous surgical operation; that should she refuse to submit to it, she could live but a few months — months of dreadful and constantly increasing suffering until the end. If she consents to undergo the operation, and it proves successful, she will be at once relieved from the agony she is now enduring, restored in a short time to sound health, and will probably never be troubled with a return of the disease; but, on the other hand, should they fail, it will be almost instant death to her.”

“And they cannot tell?”

“They cannot tell till they try. But think what a terrible dilemma for that young, lovely creature! what a hard, hard choice. Father said his heart bled for her, and I know mine does.”

“And mine,” murmured Nina, with tears in her voice. “Oh, Ernest, what did she choose?”

“To submit to the operation; begging to have it over as soon as might be. It is to be performed to-morrow at noon; and that was what father whispered to her to-night, adding that he was then going out to make the final arrangements about it, with one of the other physicians who are to be present.”

“Oh, I do not wonder now at her emotion,” said Nina, clinging to his arm. “Oh, Ernest, Ernest, how *can* she be resigned to it? she is far braver than I. I have such a terror of the surgeon’s knife; and then the possibility, the danger of instant death!” And she hid her face and shuddered.

“But she is a Christian, Nina,” he answered, softly; “and sudden death would be to her sudden glory; and how much better that than the slow tortures of the disease, lasting for months, only to bring about the same result at last. It was a terrible alternative, but she has chosen wisely, I think.”

“Will it be very painful, Ernest?” And Nina’s voice quivered with intense emotion as she asked the question.

“They will give her chloroform or ether, perhaps a mixture of the two; and if it has the desired effect, she will not feel the operation; but the worst suffering will come afterward, while the parts are healing. However, it cannot be worse nor so bad as what she endures now, and has every hour of her life for some months past.”

Nina’s last thought that night and her first in the morning were of Lily, and the terrible ordeal she was about to pass through. Her heart ached for her, and she longed for the power to comfort and help her.

Nina was too energetic by nature, too full of life and healthful activity, to waste the sweet morning hours in bed, and was often down-stairs for a long while before breakfast, strolling about the grounds, or seated in the library, or on the balcony before its windows, with a book, enjoying at the same time both it and the pure, fresh air coming laden with sweets from the garden and fields.

It was circulating freely through open doors and windows

as she descended the broad staircase to the wide entrance hall, that first morning after her return from her little jaunt. She stood a moment drinking it in with such exhilarating effect that a snatch of gay, glad song rose to her lips, when a thought of Lily checked it, and with a sobered face she turned her steps toward the library.

She glanced in at the open door, thinking to retreat if she should find Marchant there alone. He was not there, but a glimpse of a white morning-dress, whose wearer was seated in one of the large easy-chairs, placed with its back toward her, told her that some one else was.

It might be Aunt Lettice: she supposed it was; not thinking it probable that their invalid guest would leave her room so early. And with light, noiseless tread she crossed the room, coming up behind the chair, where she could look down upon the face of its occupant.

It was Lily. Her small, finely-formed head lay back among the cushions, the shining golden hair rippling over the white forehead. The long, silken lashes resting on the marble cheek were heavy with unshed tears; yet the expression of the countenance was that of deep, unutterable peace and chastened joy. One hand hung down over the arm of the chair, the other lay in her lap, with the forefinger between the leaves of a small, gilt-edged Bible.

How Nina wondered at that look of peace and joy; but a low murmur, coming from the slightly parted lips, caught her ear, and she bent eagerly forward to catch the words.

“‘Neither death nor life’—nothing, nothing can separate me from His love; ‘neither death nor life!’ precious, precious words!”

How they thrilled through Nina’s heart as if she had never heard them before, and brought the tears to her eyes. She dashed them away, stole softly back to the door, then drew near again less quietly than at first; and coming round in front of Lily, said, cheerfully, “Good-morning, Miss Donaldson. I had not expected to find you up so early. I fear you have not slept well.”

“Call me Lily, please,” said the gentle girl, taking the hand Nina held out to her, and looking up into the blooming, beautiful face with affectionate admiration. “No: I have been but a poor sleeper for the past few months.”

“Oh, you poor darling, my heart aches, *aches* for you!” cried Nina, bending down to throw her arms around her, and pressing passionate kisses on her cheek and lips. “How can you, oh, how *can* you be so sweet and patient? I should do nothing but fret and rebel.”

“No, dear, you would not,” said Lily, returning her caresses; “for He fits the back to the burden, and helps us to bear it. And oh, how the cross loses its heaviness and its bitterness in the thought of whom we are bearing it for, and of the dear, loving hand that puts it on and keeps it there.”

Nina listened with increasing surprise. “I cannot understand how any one in your sad situation can be so happy,” she said. “I know I should be wretched beyond expression.”

“Ah, no; how ungrateful that would be. Look at the mercies of my lot; the unexpected kindness of your dear father and of you all,—treating me more like a daughter and sister than a stranger. And my dread of what is before me, —unutterable and unconquerable as it was at first,—has now been almost all mercifully taken away; and I can fully trust His promise to be with me always, even unto the end. Then, as your father tells me, it is probable that I shall suffer very little, if any, physical pain at the time; and I may confidently hope for relief — permanent relief — from this agony, if they are successful. And if not, if the catastrophe they fear should take place, ah, I shall then soon be reunited to all the dear ones gone before,—shall but fall asleep to wake the next moment in my Saviour’s arms, with my head upon his breast, for neither death nor life shall separate me from His love. Oh, you cannot conceive how sweet those words are to me now! Oh, the joy, the bliss of knowing that, come what may, He is mine and I am His, and none can pluck me out of His hand!”

Her face grew radiant with holy, heavenly joy as she spoke, and the tones of her voice, low and sweet as ever, yet thrilled her listener with their rapturous cadence.

Nina's wonder and astonishment, and her loving sympathy for the sweet sufferer — causing her to tremble at the coming ordeal, shrinking from it with almost the horror and dread she would have felt had she herself been the victim — kept her unusually silent as the family gathered about the breakfast-table, and partook of their morning meal. And indeed her feelings were shared by all present; there was not a dry eye in the room as the doctor, in leading the usual family devotions, added a fervent petition on behalf of "the young stranger, the handmaid of the Lord, sojourning among them."

Lily whispered her tearful thanks as he came to her, shortly afterward, with some kind inquiry; then with the aid of his arm she retired to her own room, requesting to be left in solitude until near the appointed hour.

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE ORDEAL.

NINA was in the library, standing before a book-case, seemingly searching for something, but really seeing nothing for the tears that dimmed her eyes, when Marchant came to her side.

"Will you ride with me this morning, Nina?"

"Excuse me; I expect to ride with Ernest," she answered, without turning her head.

"Of course; I might have known it," he muttered, angrily, as he walked away; and Nina's conscience pricked her

with the remembrance of the gentle, but well-deserved reproof administered to her by Aunt Lettice the day before.

She was half inclined to call him back and say she would go; but no, her pride would not stoop to that; and she was still lingering before the book-case when, five minutes later, Ernest entered the room, and coming close to her side, said, in a low, quiet tone of affectionate, brotherly remonstrance, "I am going to say something that will sound very rude, but I know my sister will excuse it, and believe that I speak thus from no lack of appreciation of the honor and pleasure of her society. I want you to grant poor Marchant's request that you will ride with him this morning. Have you not forgotten that he has not enjoyed such a pleasure for nearly six months, and that I have had it nearly every day during that time? And are you aware that he leaves us to-morrow morning to visit his nearer relatives?"

"I did not know the last, and had forgotten the other. I am sorry I refused his request; but what can I do now? You would not have me go and beg his pardon, and humbly ask to be permitted to ride with him?"

Her tone was bitterly scornful.

"Now, Nina, do not be unreasonable; do not wilfully misunderstand me," remonstrated Ernest, gently. "You surely know I would not have you do anything so unbecoming, or sacrifice your self-respect in the least. But there is no need in this case. Only tell him of the two reasons for granting his request, which you had forgotten, or did not know; and that upon being reminded of them, you are ready to change your refusal to consent. I am sure you did not mean to give him the impression, which he somehow took up, that you were positively engaged to ride with me."

"No, I did not; and of course he accuses you of selfishness in taking care to secure me first. I'll set him right on that head. But, Ernest, I wanted to have a talk with you."

"Never mind; another time will do for that, will it not?"

"I suppose so; though there are some things I feel impa-

tient to say to you, and I know you will be going out presently."

"Yes; and I must attend to some of father's patients this morning. Would it fatigue you too much to ride Fearnought with Marchant for an hour now, and afterwards to go out with me in the gig? I think you would prefer to be out of the house at noon, and at that hour the sun will be too warm for comfortable riding on horseback."

"Your plan is excellent. I am not easily fatigued with riding; and I will go at once and tell Marchant about it. But do you know where I shall find him?"

"Look!" replied Ernest, glancing toward the window; "there he is, leaning against a tree."

"Yes; and he's in a bad humor. I know it by his very attitude."

"May it not be that some one else is partly to blame for that?" suggested Ernest, with a slight smile.

"I plead guilty to the charge, and will now try to make some atonement," she answered, in the same playful tone, and starting at once upon the disagreeable errand. For very distasteful it was; her pride rebelled against it, but Ernest and principle conquered. She knew she had behaved ill to Marchant, and ought to make some amends.

He heard, and recognized with a thrill of delight, her light, quick step on the gravel-walk, but would not seem to hear. He kept his face carefully averted, nor changed his attitude in the least.

"Marchant, I presume you are not disposed to deny that it is a woman's privilege to change her mind?"

The clear, silvery tones struck pleasantly on his ear; he was inwardly delighted, but outwardly moody and indifferent.

"It would hardly be worth while, since they take the privilege, granted or not," was his sarcastic reply. "A weather-cock is not more changeable than a woman—warm, bright, and pleasant as this summer sunshine one hour, the next, cold and cutting as bitter winter wind."



“The winter wind has its office to perform, and is needed as well as the summer sun,” she answered, lightly, “and a change is often agreeable; at present it would be particularly so in the manner of a certain gentleman. I did not know that you were expecting to leave us so soon, Marchant, or think how long it was since we have taken a ride together, or I would not have declined your invitation. Also, I find that I am not to ride with Ernest till noon, — he had not engaged me, and the blame is all mine,—so, if you still wish it, I will ride with you now.”

“I would not for the world have you put any force upon your inclinations,” he answered, ungraciously.

“Very well, just as you please, sir! I shall make no further concession, and you can do as you like,” she said, indignantly, turning on her heel to depart: “I intend to ride. I shall order my horse, and start, and you can use your own pleasure about accompanying me. Though I sincerely hope your pleasure may be to remain where you are while this unamiable mood is upon you.”

He sprang after her. “Nina, Nina, stay one moment. I beg a thousand pardons. I have been behaving like a perfect bear. I shall be delighted if you will permit me to accompany you.”

“I have already said you could use your own pleasure about it,” she answered, coldly.

“Then I will order the horses at once. It is a delightful morning for a ride.” And he hurried away toward the stables, while she walked leisurely to the house, more than half-angry with herself for having yielded to Ernest’s expostulation.

But presently she forgot her vexation in the thought of Lily, and the intense sympathy she felt for her.

“Poor, poor darling,” she murmured; “how she must shrink and tremble as the time draws near.”

Dr. Monteith was writing at a table in the library, as Nina re-entered it from the balcony. He turned, and silently motioned her to come to him.

“What is it, father?” she asked, as he drew her to his knee and passed his arm around her waist.

“I am so glad, so thankful, to see you in such perfect health,” he said, pressing her closer to him. “Thank God, my darling, that you have not to undergo what that poor young thing in the other room must this day!” And he sighed deeply.

“Father, how can you bear to do it?” she asked, shuddering, and clinging to him.

“Only because I hope to relieve her, and save her life.”

“Do you think she will live through it?”

“I cannot tell, my child; but I have prayed very earnestly for divine direction and assistance, and for success, if it be the Lord's will.”

“Then I am almost sure all will go right,” she said, laying her cheek fondly to his; “and if I were the sufferer, I would be glad that your hand was the one to hold the knife. It would not hurt me half so much as if another did it.”

He strained her silently to his heart, and let her go.

She was not disposed to be unkind to Marchant that morning, but the thought of Lily was too engrossing to allow her to be other than silent and unsocial. She could not forget her for one moment.

“What is the matter, Nina?” asked her companion, at length; “you have scarcely spoken five words since we left home; you seem to have suddenly lost all your spirits. Is it that you find my company so very disagreeable?”

“No; I was not thinking of you at all. Do you really suppose me so hard-hearted as to be gay and merry while poor Lily is in such trouble?”

“No; I am scarcely that unfeeling myself; though all I know is that she is to pass through a surgical operation of some kind; and after all, Nina, I don't see that we need distress ourselves greatly on her account, for Ernest told me they would give her chloroform, so that she will not be apt to feel any pain.”

“But she may die, Marchant, die under their very hands; and oh, it is so *dreadful* to die while you are young, and life seems so pleasant.”

“Yes, unless you are sure of going to a better place,” he answered, almost under his breath; “but there is something in her face that makes me think she is.”

“I am certain of it,” exclaimed Nina, turning away to hide the tears in her eyes; “and I do believe she more than half wants to go.”

It was not yet eleven o'clock when they returned, but Nina could not bear to remain in the house, and Marchant proposed that she should take her work to her favorite seat in the little mossy dell, and let him read aloud to her. She made no objection, and there Ernest found them an hour later.

“You seem to be very pleasantly employed,” he said. “Do you feel like fulfilling your engagement with me, Nina?”

“Oh, yes!” she cried, springing up and putting her tating into her pocket. “Marchant has been kindly doing his best to entertain me, but my thoughts will keep wandering to poor, sweet Lily. Have the doctors all come, Ernest?”

“Yes; and I am in some haste to go. Marchant, will you excuse me for carrying my sister off?”

“Certainly: it is your turn; and I cannot expect to monopolize her,” he answered, pleasantly enough; and they hurried away.

At first their talk was of Lily; then Ernest had quite a story to tell of some noble deeds of Marchant's with which he had been made acquainted in Princeton,—his daring rescue of a child from a mad dog, and his saving the life of an enemy at the risk of his own. Nina listened with downcast eyes and a cheek burning with shame, to think how ill she had been treating one who could act so nobly.

But now silence fell upon them; for they were nearing home, and another subject filled the thoughts of both. Their hearts beat faster as they turned into the grounds.

“Do you think it is over?” Nina asked, almost fearfully.

“Yes, I hope so.”

Aunt Lettice met them at the door, with a pale, agitated, and yet relieved face.

“Yes, it is over; and so far successfully,” she answered to the mute questioning of their anxious, inquiring looks. “Clarence is still with her, but the other doctors have all gone.”

Nina drew a long sigh of relief. “Oh, how thankful I am! I suppose I would not be allowed to see her yet?” and she looked from Aunt Lettice to Ernest.

“Oh, no; she must be kept very quiet,” they both replied; and the former added that an experienced nurse had been sent for from the city.

“Aunt Lettice,” said Ernest, taking hold of her wrist, and looking attentively into her face, “this has been too much excitement for you. Do go and lie down for an hour.”

“Aunt Lettice, were you with her? How kind! but oh, how could you bear it?” exclaimed Nina, in admiring surprise.

“Dearie, she has no mother, you know; and how could I leave her to endure it all alone? You would have stood by her yourself if it had been right and proper, and you had felt that your presence would be a comfort and support.”

“Yes, perhaps; I hope so,” Nina said, in a moved tone.

Ernest again urged his advice, and the old lady yielded.

Nina went with her, saw her comfortably established on a couch, and then retired to her own room to change her dress. She felt a restless desire for further news from Lily, and hurrying through her toilette, went down to the lower hall and hovered about there, hoping to get sight and speech of her father, though it should be but for a moment. She had longed to question Aunt Lettice, but refrained for fear of adding to her agitation and excitement.

The house seemed strangely silent and still; not a sound could be heard as she paced noiselessly to and fro. “Was it the stillness of death? had the fair, sweet, young stranger

suddenly passed away?" she was asking herself, in fear and trembling, and looking anxiously toward the door of the sick-room, when it opened and Dr. Monteith came out.

With an eager, questioning look she flew to meet him. He silently took her hand in his, and led her to a seat, placing himself by her side. His face was very grave, but calm, and he gave a sigh of relief as he sat down.

"Oh, father, how glad I am that you succeeded!" whispered Nina, looking up at him with eyes brimful of joyful tears. "She is quite safe now, is she not?"

"No, my child, the danger is not over yet; will not be for two weeks to come," he answered, in a moved tone; "but so far we have been successful, and I am truly thankful for it; hopeful, too, that all may go well to the end."

"Yes; but oh, I am so sorry to hear that she is not safe yet!" sighed Nina. "Tell me all about it, won't you, father? I mean all about how she bore it, and if she suffered much."

"It was beautiful to see her," he said, half musingly, his voice trembling with emotion, "as she lay there so calm, patient, and resigned, while we made our preparations; then, when I told her we were just ready to administer the chloroform, 'Please wait one moment, doctors,' she said, beseechingly; and for a single instant her hands were clasped together, and her eyes raised, while she silently committed her soul to God; for she knew — I had told her — that her waking might be in his immediate presence. 'Now I am ready,' she said. 'Jesus and heaven, if I wake no more on earth;' and I heard an added murmur, so low that I think it reached no other ear, 'Neither death nor life;' and I knew she was rejoicing in the thought that nothing could separate her from the love of Him who had died to redeem her."

"Yes, I know; I heard her this morning repeating those words, and some others that follow them," said Nina, dropping her eyes to hide the tears that filled them. "But did she feel the pain?"

“Not at all; and she feels very happy now in the thought that the operation is over. But I must leave you. There is some one in the office waiting to speak to me.”

Nina sat lost in thought for many minutes after he had left her. “This then,” she said to herself, “is true, genuine Christianity—this that makes father, Aunt Lettice, and Ernest so kind, unselfish, and benevolent, and this that could enable Lily so calmly, and even joyously, to face the prospect of sudden death. Ah, how different from the base metal of hypocritical profession—the counterfeit I once mistook for the true.”

Her meditations were interrupted by Marchant, who came softly in from the grounds, and took the seat by her side which her father had just vacated. He questioned her of Lily, and she answered readily and frankly, and with as kind a manner as she would have used to Ernest. Her heart was softened by the thought of Lily’s sufferings and danger, and her sweet, Christian patience and submission under them; and the remembrance of Ernest’s story of Marchant’s noble deeds almost blotted out, for the time, the memory of her own wrongs at his hands, and restored him to her good opinion. For the remainder of that day, and till he left the next morning, he found her altogether her old, sweet self. They parted on the best of terms, and he went away filled with joy and hope.

## CHAPTER XLII.

## AVENGED.

A FORTNIGHT of patient endurance on the part of the sufferer, of anxious watching and tender, careful nursing on that of physician and friends, and Lily was pronounced out of danger. From that time her recovery was rapid, and she was soon able to make one of the pleasant family circle at Wald.

About the same time Marchant returned, but not, as heretofore, to make his home with them. He was now to study law with an eminent jurist of Philadelphia, and it suited his convenience far better to board in the city. Yet there were not many days in which his friends at Wald did not see more or less of him.

Lily Donaldson had charmed all hearts on her first arrival at Wald, and she grew dearer to each as a further acquaintance unfolded more fully to them the beauties of her character—so perfectly guileless, so simple, loving, trustful, and true. She soon became as a daughter to Aunt Lettice and Dr. Monteith, a sister to Nina, and to Ernest—far more. With him it had been a case of love at first sight, growing daily stronger and deeper.

And to the fair, sweet girl herself Wald seemed a second paradise. Orphaned from her early childhood, with no near ties of kindred, and constantly thrown among those who treated her with indifference, if not with absolute coldness, the one great longing of the lonely heart had been for love; and here, for the first time in her life, it was lavished upon her without stint.

She knew not how to tear herself away, but as the weeks went by, and she so fully recovered as to be able to ride out

every day, and even to take walks of considerable length, she felt that she must go; that she ought no longer to encroach upon the hospitality of these kindest of friends.

“Dr. Monteith,” she said, following him into the library, one morning, “can you spare me a few minutes? I want to have a little private conversation with you.”

“Yes,” he said, kindly, taking her hand in his and leading her to a sofa. “What is it, daughter? Not illness, I hope. You are looking bright and well.”

“Oh, no, sir. Ah, I am like another woman since I came here, six weeks ago,” and grateful tears shone in her eyes. “How can I ever thank you for the relief you have given me?”

“Thank God, my dear child: I have been but the instrument in his hand.”

“I do, oh, I do, daily and hourly. And now, doctor, will you please tell me what is the amount of my pecuniary indebtedness to you? I do not ask what I owe you; for that is more than money can ever repay.”

“Suppose we do not talk of that now,” he said, smiling; “I am in no haste about it.”

“But, doctor—” she paused, in some confusion.

“Well, daughter, what is it?”

His tone was very kind and fatherly.

“I—I ought to be settling my plans for the future—deciding where I will go, and what I will do.”

“Why go at all? There is plenty of room for you here, and I would like to keep you always.”

“Ah, you are very, very kind,” she said, tears again filling her eyes; “but I have been thinking of looking out for a school, or a situation as governess, and—”

“And you are anxious to know the amount of your indebtedness, that you may be able to calculate ways and means? Is that it, my dear?”

She bowed a silent assent, for her heart was almost too full for speech.



He put his arm round her, and drawing her tenderly to him, said, with emotion, "Lily, my dear child, you have crept so far into our hearts that you seem like another daughter to me and to Aunt Lettice, and Nina loves you as a dear sister. We can't give you up; and you are too young, too frail and delicate to go out into the world and battle with it for yourself: will you not stay with us? If you think you owe me anything, repay me by helping to brighten my home until I give you some reason for thinking that I am weary of your society. I would rather have it for the next year than a thousand dollars in money; for I have more of that than I can use except in giving it away. I really ask it as a favor, dear child; for your companionship is doing much for my darling Nina, — who is the very apple of my eye, — and is making our home circle dearer to us all."

"You set a very high value on my society," she said, smiling through her tears. "I cannot feel that it is worth anything; but, oh, you do not know what you are offering me! how you are tempting me!" She paused, overcome by emotion.

"Then it is all settled," he said, pressing her hand affectionately in his. "You are to stay with us as long as we can make Wald a happy home to you; and that liquidates all you are supposed to owe your doctors and surgeons. Nor need you feel under any obligation, as I merely act as the Lord's steward of the wealth he has put into my hands. And now, my dear, excuse me. I must hurry away to my patients."

He was gone before she could find words to express her gratitude, and Nina, coming in a moment later, found her relieving her full heart by a fit of weeping.

"Crying, dear Lily!" she exclaimed, clasping her in her arms. "What can my kind father have said to hurt or grieve you so? for I just met him coming out of this room."

"Hurt or grieve me! O Nina, there never was another man so kind and generous as he! Oh, if I could but do something to repay him!"

“Stay here, darling, and be one of us; that will repay him better than anything else,” Nina answered, with a kiss. “I know it, for he told me so the other day; and Aunt Lettice has told me the very same thing; and as for myself, I would n’t know what to do without you now. I have always wanted a sister, and you seem to be the very one to fill the situation,” she added, with a light and merry laugh. “So dry up your tears and come with me; for the carriage is at the door, and father says we are to take a drive while it is cool and pleasant.”

Lily’s gentle, trustful, loving nature was just the one to yield to such kind solicitations, never doubting the perfect sincerity of her friends. She joyfully accepted Dr. Monteith’s generous invitation, and remained there for the next year; regarded by their acquaintances as a guest, but by themselves as one of the family.

She was only a few months older than Nina, but having enjoyed greater early advantages, was so much farther advanced in most of the higher branches of a good English education as to be competent to teach her friend—a task which she undertook with delight to herself and to Nina; while they shared together the instructions of Dr. Monteith, and also those of the professors of music and drawing hitherto employed for Nina alone.

A pony was provided for Lily as soon as she was able to use it; and henceforward—except during the depth of winter—the two girls found great enjoyment in almost daily rides about the country; sometimes extending them to a distance of six or eight miles or more, but never going entirely alone. Adolphus always rode a little in their rear, when they had no gentleman escort. Yet they were seldom without, except by their own choice, for Ernest and Marchant were usually at their service; and other gentlemen became frequent visitors at Wald, strongly attracted thither by the beauty, grace, and intelligence of the two lovely young ladies. Eastman and Sterritt, who were at this time sojourning in Philadelphia,—

the one as a student of medicine, the other of law, — came very often, sometimes bringing others with them.

Marchant looked on with jealous eyes ; for Nina, as the more dazzlingly beautiful, and the livelier of the two, received the larger share of admiration ; and her manner was such that it was impossible to decide which of her adorers she favored most.

The truth of the matter was that she liked them all well enough as friends, but had no warmer feeling toward any, being wholly taken up with her designs upon Marchant, and delighted with the evident jealousy she excited in him by her favor to the others. She often despised herself for the part she was playing, yet continued it ; ever urged on by the recollection of those cruel words of scorn and contempt burnt in upon her brain, and crying out for vengeance upon the cowardly speaker.

Still at times she found herself half excusing him for them, whispering to her own heart that he had doubtless bitterly repented of them, that he loved her fondly and truly now, and therefore ought to be forgiven. And there was so much in his character to respect and admire,—the tender reverence of his manner to Aunt Lettice ; his filial affection for Dr. Monteith ; his many unobtrusive acts of kindness and generosity, now and then brought to her knowledge by Ernest or by some accident,—never through Marchant's own instrumentality,—that, to be able to keep to her resolution, she had need often to remind herself of his sins against her, and to ask of her own heart if the love he showed for her was great enough to induce him to sacrifice his pride to gain her. No, she did not believe it ; and if not seeking her hand, what right had he to try to win her heart ? That thought ever filled her with anger and defiance, and strengthened her resolve to bring him to her feet only to reject his suit with scorn.

Thus her treatment of him was exceedingly capricious—her manner at one time so kind and cordial that her lover's heart would beat high with hope ; then again so cold and scornful that he would grow angry with her and with himself, and

perhaps stay away for a time. But never for long ; his chains were too tightly riveted, and, struggle as he might, he could not break them.

He could not bear to see Nina receiving attentions from other young men ; yet he knew he had no right to interfere so long as she was not his affianced bride. But still he hesitated to offer her his hand ; kept back, as Nina surmised, by the pride of birth which he had acknowledged to Aunt Lettice so long ago. Was it strange that she despised him for it, and felt that it justified her conduct toward him ?

Thus for weeks and months together pride and love waged war within him, now one and now the other gaining the ascendancy. But pride gave way more and more as love strengthened and increased ; every interview with its object adding fuel to the flame. Nina read him thoroughly, while she was an enigma to him : he could not be certain that he had made the least impression on her heart. Did he flirt with others, she looked on with an air of supreme indifference ; and if his attentions were paid to herself, they were received with equal nonchalance.

At length she perceived that her hour of triumph was at hand — that he but waited a favorable opportunity to present his suit — was, in fact, watching for it with feverish eagerness. But, with strange perversity, she now shrank from that which she had so ardently desired, had put forth such strenuous efforts to win. She carefully avoided being left alone with Marchant for a single moment ; thus prolonging his agony of suspense till it became perfectly intolerable.

“ This can be no longer endured. I must and will know my fate at once,” he said to himself, one bright June day, as he set out from his office to pay a visit to Wald.

Arriving there, fortune at first favored him beyond his hopes. The gleam of a white dress seen through the shrubbery, as he passed into the grounds, led him to turn in that direction and seek the wearer, instead of entering the house ; and to his joy, as he drew near, it proved to be Nina, seated

on a rustic bench under the shade of a wide-spreading tree, and so absorbed in a book that she was not aware of his approach until he stood close at her side. She started then and looked up, colored deeply at sight of him, and springing to her feet seemed about to run away. But he caught her hand and held it fast in his.

“Oh, Nina, why do you always avoid being alone with me of late?” he said, in tones of mingled anger and passionate love. “Can you not endure my society even for a few short moments? will you not listen to the words you surely must know that I am longing to speak? Nay, you must; you shall not go till I have told you how deeply, how passionately, how devotedly I love you!”

“By what right do you presume to say *must* to me, Marchant de Vere?” she asked, suddenly recovering her composure, drawing herself up to her full height, and regarding him with flashing eyes.

“Pardon me,” he said, coloring violently in his turn. “I did not mean to assume the right to command, which certainly is not mine; but I can endure this suspense no longer, and must hear my sentence from your own sweet lips, Nina darling. Oh, tell me! will you, can you, do you love me?”

“Love you?” she cried, snatching her hand from his grasp. “Do you mean to insult me, Marchant de Vere?”

“Insult you, Nina? Not for the world! I would fell the man or woman to the earth who should dare to offer you an insult in my presence. But what can you mean? Is it an insult to offer you my hand, heart, and fortune?—all of which I now lay at your feet—the hand and heart of a De Vere?” And he drew himself up proudly. “I know, I feel that, personally, I am not worthy of you, with your peerless beauty, your talent, wit, and numberless attractions; but I love you, Nina, madly, passionately, — with a love that began when first my eyes rested on your lovely face, and that has grown daily and hourly ever since, till now it is love of such depth and inten-

sity as I verily believe no other man could feel for you or for any other woman. Nina, will you not be mine?"

"Has the daughter of your laundress rejected you, that you come to me?" she asked, with a tone and look of indescribable scorn and contempt.

He was stunned, bewildered; then covered with confusion as memory recalled the words he had once spoken.

"What—what can you mean?" he stammered.

"Am I not a nameless waif, without pedigree? unable even to tell who is my true father, or who the mother that bore me? and is not the daughter of your washerwoman, or of any honest parents, however poor and humble their station in life, therefore entitled to look down upon me as one far beneath her? And would a De Vere stoop to wed with such an one? No, certainly not; but know, sir knight, that I can be as proud as they, and would scorn to accept a name or position from one of them."

He was overwhelmed with confusion; he shrank and cowered before her as thus, with passionate vehemence, and in tones of scathing irony and cutting scorn and contempt, she hurled back at him his own words, spoken in a fit of jealous rage so long ago. She, then, had overheard them; he knew it now; and in his bitter humiliation could almost have wished the earth to open her mouth and swallow him up. Yet he ventured one more appeal; for never had the long-coveted prize seemed so precious as now; never had he seen her so dazzlingly beautiful as at that moment.

"Oh, Nina!" he cried, "I am justly punished for the cruel words wrung from me by jealous anger, far more than by the pride to which you attribute them. But could you know how bitterly they have been repented of,—how I could have bitten my tongue in two on account of them, even in the moment of their utterance,—I am sure you would forgive and try to forget; and, oh, could you know how passionately, how madly I love you—"

"Enough. I care not to know, and I can neither forgive

nor forget," she said, turning away with a gesture of contempt and aversion.

"Oh, Nina, I have sometimes dared to hope that I was not altogether an object of indifference to you," he said, half reproachfully; "you have sometimes smiled upon me, and caused my heart to beat high with the fond hope of one day calling you my own. Oh, Nina, how can I teach myself to resign that hope? My love for you is an absorbing passion; I think of you all day and dream of you all night; I feel that life without you is not worth having. Oh, dearest, does not your generous nature prompt you to give at least a little in return for so much? Is there not the smallest spark of love for me in your heart? a spark that may some day be fanned into a flame?"

"Do I love you!" she cried, turning toward him again, with flashing eye and curling lip. "Yes, as the wild gazelle loves the hunter who pursues it for his own sport and profit; as the gay butterfly, flitting from flower to flower in the garden, loves the rude boy who would catch and imprison it for the sake of its beauty; thus, and thus only do I love you, Marchant de Vere. You have my answer, and may lay your heart at some other fair lady's feet as soon as you like. Good-afternoon, sir." And she walked away with firm, proud step and head erect.

He gazed after her for an instant with a crushed and hopeless look, and a face of almost deadly pallor; then, catching up his hat, which had fallen upon the grass, he turned and hurried from the grounds with the quick, agitated step of one who fears pursuit or would flee from himself, if that were possible.

The sound reached Nina's ear; she paused in her walk, turned, and leaning against a tree, looked and listened till his form had disappeared among the trees, and she could no longer hear the faintest echo of his footfalls. And as she thus gazed and hearkened, her cheek grew white, an expression of anguish settled down upon her features, and she pressed

both hands upon her heart, in the vain effort to still its wild throbbing. She had had her hour of triumph, to which she had so long looked forward ; had inflicted pain as acute as any she had ever suffered ; but what did it avail ? since the arrow shot from her bow had rebounded against her own heart, and in wrecking the happiness of another she had madly cast away her own. Yes, she loved Marchant de Vere almost as passionately as he loved her ; she had fought and struggled against it with all the strength of her proud, strong nature ; she had determined that she did not, would not care for him, that she hated and despised him, and had obstinately refused to look into her own heart ; but she could no longer shut her eyes to the fact ; she knew it now — now, when it was forever too late — now, when the knowledge brought only misery and despair.

She fled to the same secluded spot that had witnessed the storm of grief and passion caused by those fatal words when first they fell upon her ear ; again she cast herself down upon the ground and writhed in bitter agony—anger, pride, and resentment, love, remorse, and despair, each in turn struggling for the mastery. She loathed and despised herself for the part she had played, the falsehood she had told.

“ You, Nina Monteith,” she murmured, while hot tears filled her eyes, “ you who have been so proud of your truthfulness ; you who have so hated and despised hypocrisy and deceit, what a hypocrite and a liar you have been ! How can you ever have the smallest feeling of respect for yourself again ? ”

Nina did not appear at the tea-table, but sent Rose to say that her head was aching badly, and she would prefer to be left, for that evening, to the quiet and solitude of her own room.

Dr. Monteith was absent also, probably detained at the bedside of some patient who was too ill to be left ; and they reluctantly sat down without him.

An hour later, as Ernest, Mrs. Barron, and Lily sat on the balcony, enjoying the evening breeze and the light of the full moon, Jarvis drove in, and, checking his horse in front of them,



delivered a message from the doctor, to the effect that he had been detained with a patient who was quite ill, and on the way home had been called to attend to the injuries of an old woman, who had met with a serious accident, and whose case might possibly require his attention through the night. Therefore they were not to sit up for him, or to feel alarmed if he did not return before morning.

“Who is it, Jarvis? who was hurt, I mean?” asked Aunt Lettice.

“An ole woman that lives a little ways down de road, ma’am,” replied the man respectfully. “I dunno her name; but a wagin run over her, an’ I reckon she’s a good bit hurt.” And touching his hat to the ladies, Jarvis drove on to the stable to attend to his horses.

Aunt Lettice presently rose and went into the house, and the two young people were left alone.

“What a lovely night it is!” remarked Ernest. “Lily, what do you say to a stroll through the grounds?”

“That it is the very thing I feel inclined for,” she answered, rising and taking his offered arm.

They were formed for each other — those two. Ernest felt it in his inmost soul, and loved the fair, gentle young creature hanging on his arm with a love as deep and true and tender, if less passionate, than that which the more fiery Marchant felt for his brilliantly beautiful and fascinating Nina. As for Lily, she had learned to respect and reverence Ernest for his many sterling qualities of mind and heart, but had never thought of him in the light of a lover.

With him it was different. He had not known her many weeks before he had acknowledged to himself that she was more to him than all the world beside; and but one thing held him back from speaking his love, and suing for her hand,—that little, soft, white hand that, resting on his arm, had power to send a strange, delicious thrill through his whole frame,—but one thing; which it may be he would hardly have thought of as an obstacle, but for a chance remark that he

had once, very early in their acquaintance, heard fall from her lips.

It was an expression of opinion, or, perhaps more correctly, of feeling, very naturally drawn forth by a story that they—Ernest, Nina, and herself—were reading together; a story in which the heroine, a lady of high rank, mated with one of ignoble birth. Lily wondered at her choice, and said that she herself, if selecting a companion for life, would care far more for family than for wealth.

The words had fallen like a knell upon the true heart that was even then longing to claim her for its own; and far too frank and ingenuous to deceive her, he had resolutely sealed his lips against any expression of his love, and had ever since striven to put it away, and think of her only as a sister. But day by day he grew more hopeless of success; and there were times when he was tempted to tell her all, and know his fate from her own lips. Yet the thought that such a course might banish her from Wald, had hitherto withheld him from so doing.

But he had never found it so difficult, so almost impossible to refrain, as on this evening, while wandering about the silent grounds alone with her in the bewitching moonlight, feeling the soft touch of her hand on his arm, gazing down at her sweet face, and listening to the low, musical tones of her voice. Words of love trembled on his tongue, but remained unspoken: yet his secret was revealed to Lily in the tones of his voice, and in the ardent gaze of his fine hazel eyes into the azure depths of hers, as again and again their glances met.

She knew that she was beloved, and in the same moment got a glimpse into her own heart, and found that it had been lost to him.

They parted, and she went to her room in a strange, sweet tremor of joy and happiness. But he had not spoken; and why had he not? she asked herself; and seeing he had not, ought she to remain at Wald? She lay awake for hours pondering these questions, and at length came to the clear con-

clusion that she must go, and that at once. She would write a note to Dr. Monteith, and lay it on the desk in his private office. She could not tell the real reason of her departure, but would not speak of it as anything more than a visit to old friends, which she had long talked of making; for she did not know that circumstances might not soon occur which would pave the way for her return to the dear home she could scarce endure the thought of losing. And with this resolve she fell asleep.

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## CHAPTER XLIII.

### TURNING STATE'S EVIDENCE.

**I**T was at Judy Flanagan's bedside Dr. Monteith was ministering that night. The poor old woman's injuries were very severe. Early in the evening she was walking up and down the grassy space in front of the cottage, extending from its garden fence to the road. She held the hand of a little toddling creature, and several of her older grandchildren were gambolling about her. Suddenly a wagon with two horses attached came tearing down the road, running away; for there was no one in the vehicle.

Starting at the sound, and sending a hasty glance from side to side, to see that all her little flock were safe, Judy uttered a wild shriek, and, letting go the babe's hand, made a dash into the middle of the road, where she had just perceived the next in age busily engaged in taking up handfuls of dust and throwing them into the air. She had barely time to snatch the child and toss it over on to the grass, out of harm's way, when the horses were upon her, trampling her with their iron hoofs, and dragging the heavy wheels over her prostrate form.

On they rushed, leaving the poor old body lying there with-

out motion or sign of life ; and as Murphy and his wife — the latter uttering shrieks of grief and terror — were endeavoring to raise and bear it to the house, Dr. Monteith drove up in his gig.

“ Oh, docthor, docthor, it’s me that’s glad you’ve come; for me mother’s kilt intirely,” screamed Katy ; “ an’ me heart’s breakin’ wid grief. Oh, docthor, it’s good an’ kind ye always are to the poor an’ sufferin’ ; an’ can’t ye save me mother ? ”

“ Calm yourself, Mrs. Murphy, and I will do all I can,” he said, stepping from the gig, and giving his assistance in conveying the insensible form to the house, where they laid it on a bed.

Katy followed, wringing her hands and wailing piteously. “ Oh, me mother, me mother ; she’s kilt ! she’s kilt ! ”

“ Hush, Katy ! she’s not dead ; but you will help to kill her with your noise,” said the doctor, almost sternly ; and she ceased her cries on the instant.

Even while he spoke, he was beginning his examination into the extent of Judy’s hurts. He found one leg broken, a number of bruises on the body, and a slight cut on the head ; while there was reason to fear much more serious internal injury. It was some time before he was able to restore her to consciousness. Her head had been bound up, the broken limb set, and yet she lay as one dead.

But at length she opened her eyes, gazed about her with a bewildered look, and putting her hand to her head, asked, “ What’s wrong, Katy ? where am I ? ” Then, catching sight of the doctor, she started up with a piercing cry — “ No, no ! not him, not him ! send him away quick, Katy ; afore he minds me ould face ! ” — but fell back instantly, shuddering, and covering her face with her hands.

“ It’s just Dr. Monteith, mother,” said Katy, soothingly. “ You know he’s good to the poor, an’ can all but raise the dead ; an’ he’ll soon cure up your hurts that you got thryin’ to save little Pat from bein’ runned over.”

The doctor had scarcely seen Judy before, she having studiously avoided him whenever sickness among the other members of the family had brought him to the cottage. He was at a loss to understand her agitation at sight of him, but said kindly, "You must try to keep calm and quiet, my good woman; there is nothing worse for you at present than excitement."

"Och, but it was n't me as kilt her! it was n't me as tould her the bad news that was only a lie after all, but throwed the purty crayther into convulsions; nor it was n't me as carried off the babby, an' made believe the dead one was all. Me heart ached fur yees when I seen how your 'n was like to break wid the sorrow; an' I had it on the end of me tongue to tell you the whole truth, but she—the ould she-devil that she is—would n't let me," she groaned.

Dr. Monteith started as though he had received a stab; a sudden paleness overspread his countenance, and he glanced inquiringly from one to another of the little group about the bed.

"Her mind's wanderin'; she's gone clean out o' her head," muttered Katy, with a frightened look.

"I'm not," said Judy, overhearing her; "an' it's me as means to make a clean breast o' it afore I die." She was trembling violently. "Docthor, am I kilt?" she asked, in tones of affright.

"You are very seriously injured," he replied, gently; "but we will hope for the best. Yet, as it may be that you have not long to live, whatever you have to do should be done quickly. Is your soul at peace with God, my friend?"

She shook her head with a bitter groan. "No, no; an' it's me, Judy Flanagan, as can't die in peace till I've made a clean breast o' 't till you. An' Pat, it's you as must run for a lawyer to take down me ividence, or the docthor'll niver git his own out o' the hands o' that ould she-dragon. Docthor, what was it ye said? have n't I the laste bit o' a chance fur life?"

“I think you will live for several days,” he said; “and there is a possibility that you may get up from this bed again; a possibility that will be greatly increased by relieving your mind, if you have any weight upon it.”

“Thin, docthor,” she cried, catching his hand, and looking eagerly into his face, “will yees promise not to sind me to the penitentiary for what I’m a goin’ to tell yees?”

There was scarce more color in his face than in hers, as he bent over her and said, very low and with a slight tremor in his voice, but clearly and distinctly, “Tell me the truth, the whole truth, Judy, and that only, and you need fear nothing from me.”

“An’ will ye protect me from her?” she asked, glancing fearfully about the room.

“I think I can promise that she shall not harm you, whoever she may be,” he answered; “and now, Judy.”

Murphy and his wife looked pale and troubled, and an uneasy glance was exchanged between them.

Judy saw it. “Don’t ye be feared, Katy,” she muttered. “Docthor, she an’ her man had n’t nothing to do wid it; it was just me and her, the ould she-divil. Don’t ye mind me ould face, Dr. Monteith? Have ye forgot the ould nurse as ’tended the beautiful lady at Avonmore, up the North River, when she lay a dyin’, an’ ye comed home to find her too far gone to spake till yees? an’ have you forgot how she looked up at yees so beseechin’ like wid her big black eyes? an’ have n’t ye niver wondered that her as ye calls yer daughter, is like the very picter of yer dead wife!” And she clutched his arm, and looked fixedly into his face.

“Yes, yes,” he said, hoarsely; “go on, go on, if you have anything to tell.”

“An’ ye’ll not put me in jail if I git up again?”

“No, no; you shall not suffer for your crime, — if crime you have committed, — shall not be prosecuted, if only you will now make all the amends in your power.”

The doctor was becoming fearfully agitated, but controlled his feelings by a mighty effort of his iron will.

“It was n’t me as iver had the laste bit o’ enmity till ye, docthor, or till the purty lady,” Judy went on, with a groan; “but Mrs. Craven, she’d been very good till me and the childer; an’ whin she tould me she’d been robbed o’ her inheritance, an’ axed me would I hilp her git it back, I did n’t stop a minit to think, but jist said, ‘yis, mum, wid all me heart I will;’ but it niver intered me mind the sort o’ hilp she’d be afther wantin’ o’ me.”

“Try to tell your story as briefly as possible, for you have neither time nor strength to waste,” said Dr. Monteith, as she paused for breath, and lay back on her pillow pale and exhausted. He held a spoon to her lips as he spoke; she swallowed the contents, and presently went on with her narrative, the substance of which we will give in our own words.

Some years before the opening scenes of our story, Judy Flanagan had come over from Ireland to join her children,—a son and three daughters,—who had preceded her and settled in Philadelphia and its vicinity. She landed in New York, fell into the hands of sharpers, and was robbed of her little all. The letter written by a friend to apprise her children of her coming had never reached them. As a consequence, they did not meet their mother; and she, an ignorant woman, and a stranger in a strange land, did not know how to find them.

In the midst of her distress she met Mrs. Craven—the sister of Mr. Delacourt—in the street, told her pitiful tale, and asked for a little help in money and advice. The lady listened to her story, gave her what she needed, and sent a servant to see her safely in the cars. Judy was very grateful, and when Mrs. Craven came to her a few years afterward, saying she wanted her assistance, she readily promised to do whatever was asked of her. Mrs. Craven then cautiously unfolded her plans. She wished to engage Judy as nurse to a young married lady, the adopted daughter of a brother of hers. She had already rented a small cottage in the vicinity of Avonmore, the country-seat where her niece was living, and she wanted Judy to remove to it at once; bringing with her a

widowed daughter and a grandson, a boy of ten or twelve. She would have use for all three, she said, and would pay them liberally for their services.

Judy asked what services she required besides the nursing of the lady; and in reply Mrs. Craven told her an artful tale concerning Mr. Delacourt's will; asserting that she had been foully wronged by Mrs. Monteith, who was "a heretic," and would use the property in opposing the "true church," while if she herself — really the lawful heir — could but get possession of it, she would endow churches and convents, and thus greatly advance the interests of the "true faith."

Judy, who was a bigoted Papist, listened eagerly, and felt ready to do almost anything to assist in the accomplishment of such ends.

Having thus prepared the way, Mrs. Craven at length cautiously hinted at her intention to attempt the abduction of the expected heir of Avonmore, in order to secure the inheritance to herself in case of the death of Mrs. Monteith. Judy reluctantly consented to give her assistance in this, and their removal to the cottage was at once effected.

After that she saw Mrs. Craven almost daily, and gradually their plans were matured. In order to success, they must manage to dispense with the presence of both husband and physician; which was no easy matter, as Mr. Monteith was devoted to his wife, and seldom left her for an hour. And besides this, there was an old aunt of his who watched over them both with untiring affection, and who would prove quite as serious an obstacle as either of the others.

"If I could only get them out of the way, even for a few hours," Mrs. Craven said, again and again, "I could soon manage it. One need only run to her with a report of some terrible accident to him, and the thing would be done."

At last chance seemed to favor them. One evening Mrs. Craven ran into the cottage in breathless haste, to say that Mr. Monteith was to go to New York early the next morning, — some very important business demanding his attention



— and would not return till noon of the following day. He was to drive to the depôt in the Avonmore carriage, taking with him a gentleman guest, who expected to leave by the same train. And now she bade them all be prepared to act their parts in assisting her to carry out her scheme.

Peter, Judy's grandson, was to watch the carriage to the depôt, and, as it started upon its return, rush out suddenly from the covert of some bushes on a steep hillside, and with a loud whoop frighten the horses, and cause an upset; then to run on to Avonmore with the news that Mr. Monteith had been thrown from the carriage, and killed; which report Mrs. Craven was to take care should be heard by the young wife. She was also to get the aunt out of the way by means of lemonade drugged in a manner to produce excessive nausea and vomiting.

“But how did you expect to account to the father for the disappearance of his child?” asked Dr. Monteith, interrupting Judy at this point in her narrative, and speaking in a voice almost choked with emotion.

“We hoped 't would be dead born, sir, as wud be most likely whin the mother was so frightened; an' thin we would n't need to put it out o' the way; an' if it was alive, there was a dead one we could a got to put in its place. The saints—or may-be 't was the divil—favored us; an' a woman that was beholden to Mrs. Craven, had had a dead-born babby that very mornin'.”

“Wretches! murderers!” he exclaimed, burying his face in his hands, while his whole frame shook and trembled with the strength of his suppressed feelings.

“Now mind yer promise that no harrum should come to me if I tould ye the thruth!” cried Judy, again clutching his arm in terror. “I'll not till yees another word if yer agoin' to have me took up for my part in 't; for 't was her more'n me; she forced me intil it, she did.”

“Go on, go on!” he groaned; “you need have no fear that I will break my promise, if you keep yours. Was it the

dead child you have spoken of that I was made to believe was my own ? ”

“ No, no ; that was yer own, docthor, as sure as I ’m a livin ’ woman ; an ’ it died o ’ itself, too. I ’m a awful old sinner, but there ’s no blood on me hands, thank God, an ’ the Blessed Virgin, an ’ the saints. ”

“ Go on, go on ; you are torturing me beyond endurance, ” he cried.

“ Well, I wull. It all happened as we ’d planned it ; you went off, an ’ Peter he frighted the horses, an ’ they run an ’ throwed out the gent that was in the carriage,—I niver heard why he had n ’t gone wid ye in the cars,—an ’ Peter he run like a streak o ’ lightnin ’ up to Avonmore, an ’ shouted out that Mither Monteith was throwed out, and kilt intirely ; an ’ Mrs. Craven ran with the ill news to the beautiful lady ; and she, purty craythur, fell down in convulsions. An ’ I was there—havin ’ just come up to the big house—chance-like, you know, to get word with the lady ; an ’ I was called right in, an ’ there was n ’t time to git the docthor there afore it was all over ; an ’ certain sure the saints, or the divil, helped us agin ; fur there was two o ’ the little craythurs, as like as two peas, an ’ both ’mazin ’ like the mother ; an ’ one was dead,—no, it drawed a few breaths, but that was all,—an ’ ’tother was a livin ’. ”

“ Two ! twins ! ” cried Dr. Monteith, starting to his feet. “ What a fool I have been never to think of that ! But what, what became of the living one ? ” he asked, in almost frantic tones.

“ You ’ve got her now, docthor ; an ’ you ’ve had her this some years back ; so don ’t be for takin ’ revenge on a poor ould craythur, as has been repentin ’ all the time, day an ’ night, since iver the black deed was done. ”

“ Nina my own ! is it, can it be true ? ” he cried, a gleam of unspeakable joy lighting up his features for an instant. “ But oh, my wife, my murdered wife ! ” and his head sank

upon his breast, everything else forgotten in the bitter anguish of that thought.

Judy shuddered. "She seemed unconscious-like," she muttered in a hoarse whisper; "but there was a little, faint cry from the livin' one: an' she opened her eyes an' looked at it, an' tried, feeble-like, to reach for it, when Mrs. Craven put the dose into its mouth that was to keep it quiet till it could be hid away."

"And that, *that* was what she tried so hard to tell me with her last dying breath," he groaned. "Oh, my darling, my darling! would that I could have understood you!"

"Yes, I knowed it was; an' I could hardly keep in from tellin' it all out meself," muttered Judy, "when I see the bitter grief in her swate young face, an' in yer own, docthor. But the ould she-divil, she shook her head at me, an' I dare n't spake a word."

"And what did you and she do with my child?"

"The dose made it sleep like a stone, an' me daughter come up to the house to spake till her mother, an' she carried it away under her shawl. We kep' it in our house near a week, when Mrs. Craven took it away: she did n't tell me where, but I've found it all out since. She took it to a farm-house somewheres in New England, to folks that had n't no childer o' their own; an' they were good to it, an' made a great pet o' it wile they lived. But both on 'em died when the little craythur was 'bout ten year old; and then it was took to Philadelpy by some folks as did n't trate it well; an' thin off to another place up country somewheres; an' thin, afther a while, she ran off an' come to you. An' so you've got your own at last."

She stopped, seemingly exhausted by the exertion of saying so much. He rose, and was moving away, but she caught his arm again. "Wait," she whispered, "there's a bit more. I liked the purty little craythur, an' I was very sorry for yees, too; an' I dressed her in some o' the purty clo'es we found that the mother had got ready for her; an' I loopit

up her sleeves wid some bits o' ornaments made up o' red beads, and bright goold clasps to 'em; an' I pinned the little babby blanket close around her, so 's Mrs. Craven should n't see 'em: kase I thought may-be they 'd help the poor little craythur to find her own folks some day. An' I slipped in one o' the lady's beautiful handkerchies trimmed wid illigant lace. Mrs. Craven niver said nothin' 'bout 'em; so I don't know whether she found 'em and took 'em off or not."

"Thank you," he said; "they may be of great assistance in proving my child's identity." And then he groaned, "Oh, my Nina, my darling!" thinking not of his child, but of his wife.

He was moving away from the bedside, but Judy cried out, "An' wad ye lave me now to die o' me hurts? now, when I've tould ye all this 'bout yer daughter?"

"You are not dying," he said, coming back to her; "and having relieved your mind, it may be that you will recover. I have dressed your wounds, and done all that I can for you at present. And now I must leave you with your son and daughter, and go home for a little rest. I will come again in a few hours to see how you are. May God forgive you for the crime you have confessed, as I do."

"Wait, docthor, there 's more to tell." There was no one in the room with them now. Katy had gone out to attend to her children some time before, and Murphy had long since crept away to his bed, for he was weary with his day's work; and Judy's story was told ramblingly and at intervals, as she found strength and breath. "Had ye iver a little boy, docthor?" she asked.

He started, and his heart seemed to come up into his mouth, as he replied, "Yes; but he lived only two years."

"Are you sure o' that? did you see him die?" she questioned, half raising herself from her pillow in her eagerness.

"No, no; I was away at the time — in Europe; but —"

"He did n't die thin. I could e'en a'most take me oath on that."

“How? what do you know of it?” he asked, in intense excitement. Could it be that he was to recover both of his long-lost darlings?

“Wull, a year or so afore the things happened that we’ve been talkin’ about, Mrs. Craven come to Philadelphy, and she had the purtiest little two-year old boy wid her. I was livin’ wid me daughter Bridget. She was takin’ care o’ another little chap jist the same age to a month; an’ he was very sick when Mrs. Craven come; an’ Biddy was worried ’most out o’ her sines; kase he was a rich widdy-man’s son, an’ she was well paid for takin’ care o’ him, an’ she did n’t like to lose the wages; an’ was feared, too, that the father would blame her if the child died. Wull, Mrs. Craven she sot there wid us for an hour, lookin’ first at one leetle chap and then at ’t~~o~~her, wid them sharp black eyes o’ hern, an’ jist when she was gittin’ up to go, the child was took all of a suddint wid a fit an’ died.

“Biddy, she was most wild; an’ Mrs. Craven she says, ‘Don’t fret, Bridget, but listen to me. You say the father o’ this child has n’t seen it for a year. Now, he can’t know much about its looks, — they change so at that age; s’pose ye palm off this one onto him.’ An’ she put her hand on the leetle chap she’d brot wid her, an’ told us he was a orphant, an’ had no friends, and we’d be doin’ a real charity to make the rich widdy-man b’lieve he was his’n; an’ she’d jist take the dead un away wid her an’ have it buried in New York.”

Dr. Monteith’s breath came hard and pantingly between his shut teeth, and he clenched his hands till the nails were buried in the flesh.

“So we ’greed to it,” continued Judy, “an’ kep’ the livin’ child while she took away the dead. An’ the widdy-man he niver found it out till the little fellow had grown up and turned Protestant, an’ then the praste he made Bridget tell it whin the father lay a dyin’, — the widdy-man, I mane, — an’ he jist disinherited the boy, an’ left him widout a cint; an’ thin he comed to you, an’ you took him in, an’ I’ve heard

you've give him yer name. An' there was some letters on some o' his leetle clo'es, rale fine stuff they was made of, too. If you'll lift the lid o' yon chist, ye'll see a leetle roll o' linen in that fur corner. It's the leetle shirt he had on, an' it's got the letters on it."

Dr. Monteith hastily crossed the room, and with a trembling hand lifted the lid of the chest and drew forth a tiny roll. He unfolded it, and his eye fell upon the initials C. E. M., in his own hand-writing. With a cry, "My son, my little Ernest, my darling boy!" he let it fall, and covered his face with his hands.

"I knowed it! I knowed it!" cried Judy, fairly starting up in the bed in her excitement. "I knowed they was brother an' sister; an' I've been awful worried lest they'd be gittin' married to other; an' that's jist what's kep' her a comin' round here, an' tryin' to git the purty young craythur away, by fair means or by foul." She sank back panting and groaning upon her pillow.

"Then it was she, Mrs Craven, who so tormented my poor Nina?" exclaimed the doctor, inquiringly, as he stepped to the bedside again. "Tell me, tell me what you know of her plans and purposes. Did she bring you into this neighborhood that you might assist her?"

"No, no, docthor; no, no. I come here o' meself to be with Katy, an' did n't know ye lived near; an' *she* knowed nothin' o' where I was till Mary Haggerty sint her word about the young lady, and she come here to see what she could do to git her away from yees."

"Ah, then she was aiming at again robbing me of my darling? I was sure of it."

"Indade she was, docthor; an' there's no knowin' whin she'll be afther thryin' it agin," panted Judy.

He administered a restorative, waited a moment for it to take effect, then asked, "What do you know of her doings? Remember your promise to make a clean breast to me."

She nodded her head. "Yis, yis, I'm a goin' to. She

wants to git the young lady intil a convent ; fur she knows ye 'd niver be able to git her out o' that, if oncet she was safe in there widout yer knowin' where she was. You see she 's been awful feared ye 'd find out she was yer own, an' thin claim the property she got by yer wife's death. An' she was worried, too, fur fear the brother and sister wud marry each other ; an' so she tried coxin', and tried carryin' her off, but could n't do neither."

"Then she has been at the bottom of all these attempts?" he said. "She was the gypsy fortune-teller, I suppose ; and the writer of those anonymous notes, and the instigator of the wretch who sprang out upon my daughter, when riding along the road, and seized the bridle of her pony?"

"Shure, sir, she was at the bottom o' all thim doin's," groaned Judy, moving restlessly on her pillow. "An' 't was her own son as caught the pony's bridle ; an' it was an awful blow the young lady give um right in the eyes. He was here for days afore they could get him away, an' was groanin', an' swearin', an' screamin' wid the pain all the time ; but too feared o' bein' took to jail to send for a docthor to tend to um."

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## CHAPTER LIV.

### GREAT SORROW AND GREAT JOY.

THE first faint signs of the coming day might be discerned in the eastern sky, as Dr. Monteith left the cottage of the Murphys and walked down the road toward Wald. He moved with the hurried step of one under great and unusual excitement ; not pleasurable, for his head was bowed upon his breast, his hands were tightly clenched, and a groan, a sigh, or a muttered word, breathed in tones of anguish, now

and then burst from his lips. "My murdered wife! my darling! Oh, the cruel wretch! the fiend!"

He gained his own room without disturbing any one in the still sleeping household. Then followed some hours of fearful anguish,—of terrible conflict with the natural desire for vengeance, mingled with earnest prayer for help to forgive as he would be forgiven.

He was heard; a great calm followed the tempest—the peace of God filling his heart and soul; while the thought of the present bliss of his beloved one, and the joyful reunion with her which awaited him, greatly assuaged his bitter sorrow.

The new day had brought with it renewed health and hope to Nina, and she had left her bed saying to herself, "Why should I be so despairing? If he loves me with half the passionate fervor that he professes, he will not be discouraged by one rejection; he will come back, and again lay his heart at my feet, and will prize me all the more for the difficulty in winning me." And hurrying through her toilette, she ran gayly down the stairs and out upon the lawn, warbling a song almost as sweet and joyous as those the birds were singing over her head.

Her father's voice recalled her to the house. He stood in the doorway, and, as she bounded to his side, she exclaimed, at his pale and haggard looks, "You are ill, father! you ought to be in bed. They have kept you up all night! What a shame! And yet how glad you look!"

"My darling! my Nina! my own, *own* daughter!" he cried, catching her in his arms and straining her to his breast in a transport of joy, and kissing her lips, her cheeks, her forehead, her eyes; "my own, my *own*, and my Nina's child; bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh!"

At his words a sudden paleness overspread her face, and she looked up eagerly and inquiringly into his. "Could he really mean it? could it be true?"

"Yes, yes, it is the truth! you are in very deed my own



darling child, given me by God himself," he said, in answer to her look; and with a wild cry of unutterable joy she threw her arms about his neck, and, hugging him close and closer still, returned his caresses; then hid her face on his breast in a burst of tears and sobs.

Never had she been so unspeakably happy as at that moment; yet her tears and sobs seemed rather the tokens of grief; and Ernest, coming hastily down the stairs, asked, in a tone of concern and alarm, as he stepped quickly to her side, what had happened to disturb her thus.

Dr. Monteith started at the sound of his voice, and half disengaging himself from Nina, held out his hand, his face beaming with joy, love, and paternal pride. "Ernest, my son, this is joy, not grief; and you too are a sharer in it. You are my own children: she is my daughter, your sister, and I the glad father of you both. Can you believe it? can you realize it?"

He spoke rapidly, eagerly, and drawing the young man to his side, threw an arm around him also; while Nina, lifting her head with another joyful cry, turned and threw herself upon her brother's neck. Ernest put his arm about her, but looked from one to the other in a bewildered way, wondering if it were not all a dream.

"It is no dream, my son," said Dr. Monteith, in a voice that trembled with emotion; "not a dream, but a blessed reality. I have just learned, by the tardy confession of one of the guilty parties, that you are my own children, whom I had long believed dead, but who were really stolen from me in infancy."

Ernest's face flushed, tears of joy sprang to his eyes; he gave Nina a fervent embrace, then putting her gently aside, threw himself upon his father's breast, crying, "My father, my dear, dear father! Thank God, thank God, that I am no longer alone in the world!"

"Ah, yes, thank God! thank him, and bless his holy name for this, his unmerited goodness and mercy to us!" echoed

Dr. Monteith, in low, moved tones. He drew them into the library, and seating them upon a sofa, and himself between them, with an arm about each, briefly related the whole story.

They wept with him over the untimely death of their lovely young mother, and listened with grief and indignation to the account of the wrongs she and they had suffered at the hands of Mrs. Craven; yet mingled with these bitter feelings, and even stronger than they, was the sweet, new joy of their restoration to each other.

Their father told them something of his own fearful struggle, his victory gained by a strength not his own, the sweet peace that now filled his soul, and exhorted them to forgiveness and love toward those who had wronged them.

He was still speaking, they were still hanging about his neck with tears of love and joy, when Aunt Lettice came in, and the story had to be repeated to her. Her surprise, her joy, her gratitude, were scarcely less than theirs, and she shared their grief and indignation also; even her gentle spirit being roused for a time to a desire for vengeance upon the principal author of all their woes.

“I always felt doubtful of Mrs. Craven’s professions of love to our darling Nina, and of grief for her loss,” she said, addressing Dr. Monteith, while the tears streamed down her aged cheeks. “I had no proof, but I felt that they were insincere; yet who could have believed her capable of such crimes? It is not easy to forgive her; but the other—poor old Judy—was but a tool, and doubtless has bitterly repented of her share in the dreadful business.”

“She has,” said the doctor; “and now I remember that she told me of gold-clasped ornaments with which she looped up the infant’s sleeves, and of a lace-trimmed handkerchief, which she folded about its neck, hoping that they would some day assist in the discovery of its true parentage.”

“Yes; I missed those armlets, and supposed they had been stolen,” said Mrs. Barron.

“Oh, I have seen them! they are in Mrs. Powell’s posses-

sion now, I presume," cried Nina, clapping her hands with delight at this new proof of the truth of Judy's story. "They were some years ago; and I greatly wondered how she had come by them, but little suspected that they belonged to me. Oh, what a hypocrite that woman is!"

"Try to judge her leniently, my daughter," said the doctor. "But we must recover them," he added, thoughtfully; "everything that my wife's hand has touched is precious to me."

Lily met them at the breakfast-table, and glanced with surprise from one beaming, excited countenance to another.

"We have no secrets from you, daughter," said Dr. Monteith, smilingly, and Ernest's heart leaped at the word; "but desire to make you a sharer in all our joys. We have a wonderful tale to tell you this morning; a wonderful instance of the goodness of our God in bringing to light a secret that has darkened our lives for many years past."

With this preface, he began and quickly unfolded the strange story to her astonished ears. And she heartily rejoiced with them, though she now learned for the first time that there had ever been any mystery to be revealed in regard to the birth of Ernest and his sister.

They lingered long over the table that morning, yet the viands were carried away almost untouched. A glad thanksgiving went up from the family altar, the servants joining in it with all their hearts, and then they turned their thoughts to the duties of the day.

"You need rest, father; you ought at once to take some hours of sleep," said Ernest. "Can you trust your patients to me?"

"Yes, my son," replied the happy father, with an indescribably joyous intonation on the last word; "come with me to the office, and I will give you the necessary directions."

They left the room, and Aunt Lettice followed, intent on some household duty; Lily ran away and shut herself up to write her letter, which seemed a harder task than ever,—

the home she was resigning was so full of sunshine, joy, and love, — and Nina found herself alone.

She tied on her garden-hat, and wandered out into the grounds, half unconsciously bending her steps to the spot where she and Marchant had parted yesterday — parted in anger, and, as she then believed, forever. She did not believe it now. Ah, no; he would come back,—perhaps to-day or to-morrow,—and with what joy would he learn that the only impediment to their union was taken out of the way — that she had now a name and a pedigree quite equal to his own. How glad she was that he had offered yesterday; how she would have despised him and doubted the reality of his love, if he had waited for this mystery to be cleared up. She could now fully appreciate his family pride, and his nobleness of soul in thus sacrificing it to his love; and she hated herself as she thought of the return she had made.

But he would come back, and all would be made right between them. She repeated it to herself again and again, in the vain effort to silence the misgivings that marred the deep, unutterable joy which had come to her that day.

Ernest received his directions, rose to go, paused, hesitated, looked at his father, colored deeply, and resumed his seat, with his hat in his hand, and his eyes on the carpet.

“What is it, my son?” asked the doctor, the proud, fond, fatherly affection in his tones thrilling through Ernest’s very heart. It gave him courage to speak, to pour out the whole story of his love for Lily, and ask his father’s approval and his permission to prefer his suit.

The doctor gave it warmly. “She is as dear as a daughter to me now,” he said. “Win her if you can, my dear boy; yet do not set your heart on marrying at once. You are both too young, in my judgment; Lily too frail and delicate; and you must wait a year at least.”

“Yes, sir,” assented Ernest, with a half sigh. “I ought, also, to first prove my ability to support a wife; which my profession will not enable me to do under a year, at the shortest.”

"Ah, I am glad to hear you say that; it is the right kind of feeling," replied his father, with an approving smile; "for though I am, of course, abundantly able to support you all, I would not like to see you willing to fold your hands in idleness, and live in dependence upon another, even though that other was your own father. However, the recovery of the Avonmore estate, of which there can now hardly be a doubt, will soon give you abundant means of your own. Yet, as a Christian, you will still feel it a duty to make good use of time and talents; and as an affectionate and dutiful son, will not marry till your father gives his consent."

"I should be unworthy of such a father, if I could for an instant entertain the idea," replied the young man warmly, as again he rose to go.

Lily was reading alone in the library just before the dinner hour, when Dr. Monteith came in and seated himself on the sofa by her side. She closed her book, and looked up into his face with a blush and a smile.

"Well, my dear little girl," he said, taking her hand in one of his, and stroking and patting it affectionately with the other, "I found your note on my office-table just now, and read it with some little surprise. I am sorry you want to leave us. How soon do you intend to return?"

"I—I have hardly made any definite plan in regard to that, sir," she answered, a vivid blush suffusing her fair cheeks as she spoke.

"Well, don't let us be deprived of your society too long," he said; "and if you are not in too great haste to get away, you would do me a favor by putting off your journey for a week or so, that Aunt Lettice may not be left alone in our absence."

She looked up inquiringly.

"I am going to take my son and daughter to Millcote, Oakdale, and Avonmore," he said; "on what business you will be at no loss to conjecture. We expect to start next Mon-

day, and will probably be absent' several days; but Aunt Lettice does not care to accompany us. Will you stay with her?"

"Oh, yes, sir; gladly."

"It will not inconvenience you?"

"No, sir; not in the least."

"Lily," whispered Ernest, coming to her side that evening, as she sat before the piano, running her fingers lightly over its keys, "you are losing all this beautiful moonlight. Did you not enjoy our stroll last night sufficiently to repeat it now?"

There was a slight tremulousness in his tones, and an ill-suppressed eagerness, that made her heart flutter, and brought the warm blood to her cheek. She was glad that the light from the shaded lamp on the distant centre-table did not make it visible to him.

"Where are the others?" she asked.

"Aunt Lettice has fallen asleep in her chair, and father has carried Nina off somewhere; to see old Judy, I suppose. She begged to see the sweet young lady, that she might ask her pardon. Will you come?"

"Yes," she murmured, rising and taking his offered arm.

It was still early when Dr. Monteith and Nina returned. They had walked home in utter silence, her hand in his, the thoughts of both full of the sad past Judy had been speaking of. He led her to the library, and taking her in his arms, folded her close to his heart, holding her there as a precious treasure from which he could never bear to part. Neither spoke for many minutes; her arms were about his neck, her cheek lay close to his.

"Oh, what a joy this day has brought to me!" he murmured, at last. "My own darling little daughter, how precious you are to your father's heart! How can I ever resign you to another, as I suppose I must some day?"

"No, never, father, my own dear, dear father!" she cried, clinging more closely to him, and returning his caresses,

—for he was pressing warm kisses on her cheek, her forehead, and her lips; “nobody shall ever take me away from you.”

He smiled half sadly, as he stroked her hair with a thoughtful look. “I do not like to think of it,” he said, with a slight sigh; “but I doubt not there will come a time when I shall hold only the second place in your heart; and it is right that it should be so.”

“But I will never leave you, never, *never!*” she cried, hugging him closer and closer; “we will always live together. You must never give me to any one who will take me away from you.”

“No; I will not,” he said, smiling fondly upon her; “so be careful whom you allow to steal your heart.”

A lamp was burning on the table near to which they had seated themselves, and the evening paper lay beside it. Presently he took it up and glanced over it. His eye fell upon a list of the passengers sailing by that day’s steamer, and he uttered an exclamation of astonishment. “What! Marchant de Vere gone to Europe? Gone without so much as coming to bid us good-bye, or to tell of his intention. It is very strange, *very!*”

He felt Nina’s arms tighten about him as he spoke, and a shiver run through her frame; and glancing at her face, he saw it turn deadly pale, then flush crimson.

He pushed the paper from him, put back the long, clustering curls that half veiled her face, and, gazing earnestly into it, said, in a grieved tone, “You know something of this, my daughter. Ah, is it so? has my little girl rejected one to whom she had certainly given great encouragement? Such conduct was not worthy of my darling.”

“Oh, father, don’t be angry with me,” she murmured, in tones of suppressed anguish. “I did not think you would be so ready to give me away.” And the tears she so rarely shed burst forth in a torrent.

“Hush, hush, my precious child,” he said, soothing her with the tenderest caresses, and again clasping her close to

his heart ; “ it was not that, not that ; no, no : it was only that I would have you too noble and true to find pleasure in winning hearts only to break them, or in anything that can give needless pain to another.”

“ Did you want me to accept Marchant ? ” she asked, almost under her breath.

“ Not unless you loved him ; though he is dear as a son to me,” he answered, with gentle tenderness ; “ but it grieves me that you should raise hopes in his breast which you never meant to gratify.”

It was on her tongue to tell of her bitter provocation ; but no : she could not stoop to that ; she would sooner bear even the reproaches of the father she almost idolized ; sooner lose his good opinion, which she valued above everything else.

“ Forgive me, dear, dear father,” she murmured ; “ only forgive me this once, and I will never play the coquette again. Oh, I could not bear to lose your love ; no, not the least bit of it ! ”

“ That you need never fear, my own precious child,” he said. “ I have nothing to forgive ; your sin was against God and Marchant, not against me. And now we will say no more about this painful subject. Here come Ernest and Lily,” he added, in a whisper ; “ dry your eyes, that they may not ask the cause of your tears.”

Nina, too, had heard the approaching footsteps, and hastily leaving her father’s arms, she withdrew into the shadow of the window-curtain.

At the same instant, Ernest entered with the blushing Lily on his arm, both faces radiant with happiness. He led her to Dr. Monteith.

“ Father, I bring you another daughter,” he said, in low, thrilling tones of deepest joy ; “ she has promised to be mine. You will love her for my sake and for her own ? ”

“ I will, my son ; I do,” he answered, in a moved tone ; and, as they knelt before him, he laid a hand on each drooping head, and gave them a father’s blessing.



Nina could bear no more ; she glided noiselessly from the room. Glad and thankful she was for Ernest and Lily ; she had never loved them better than at that moment ; but, oh, the bitter anguish of the thought that a like cup of happiness had been presented to her lips, and that her own hand had madly dashed it away. And now Marchant was gone, — gone so far away, — seas would roll between them ; and he would never come back, *never*. How could she have imagined for a single instant that he would have so little self-respect as to return and repeat an offer which she had rejected with such scorn and contempt? No : if he possessed one spark of manliness, he would never do it ; and she would despise him for it, if he did. But no one should suspect that she ever had cared for him, and she would not any longer ; she would tear his image from her heart, and forget that ever he had been more to her than friend and brother.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### CAUGHT IN HER OWN NET.

ESSIE POWELL, put down that book and help me to clear this table ; that lazy Bridget is not half through the washing yet."

Mrs. Powell's voice had lost none of its sharpness in the three years that had rolled by since Nina's departure from Millcote ; and Essie rose quickly from her seat by the window, glancing from it as she laid her book on its sill.

"Mother, mother," she exclaimed ; "there's a carriage stopping at our gate ! the handsomest carriage I ever saw ; with a colored driver, and—"

"Coachman, Esther. When will you learn to express yourself properly," interrupted her mother. "Don't waste time

standing there: they can want nothing here but to inquire their way."

"No, mother; they must be coming in," cried the little girl, in a low, excited tone; "for they have got out of the carriage,—two gentlemen and a lady,—and one of the gentlemen is opening the gate."

"Go to the door, then, and ask them into the parlor. I must run up the back-stairs and change my dress. I'll see no such grand people in this old faded calico wrapper."

The visitors were already on the porch, when Esther reached the front door, which stood wide open. A tall, fine-looking man, in the prime of life, was in the act of ringing for admittance; while a little in his rear stood a younger gentleman, strongly resembling him in form and feature, and a lady of surpassing beauty.

She was glancing about her with a look of eager interest; and as her eye fell upon Essie, she sprang forward with a joyful cry, "Oh, you darling! how glad I am to see you," and catching her in her arms, hugged her closely, kissing her over and over again. "Don't you know me, Essie darling?" she asked.

"Nina, my own Nina!" cried the child, her voice ringing out joyously, as she gave one look up into the bright, beautiful face, then returned the caress with tears of delight. "Oh, I thought you'd never, never come back any more," she sobbed, hiding her face on Nina's neck.

"And I thought I never should, either," said Nina, smoothing back the waves of sunny hair with soft, caressing hand, and as the little face was lifted to hers again, gazing lovingly into the sweet, tearful blue eyes; "but here I am, and my own, own dear father and brother with me; and you must let me introduce you to them. Father, and brother Ernest, this is my darling little Essie, of whom you have so often heard me speak. She has grown a great deal, but I think I should have known her dear face anywhere."

"It is a dear face; one to remember and to love," said Dr.

Monteith, taking the little hand in his, and stooping to press a fatherly kiss on the white forehead of the blushing child.

Ernest shook hands with her also ; and Essie, still clinging to Nina, and fluttering with joy, led the way to the parlor, and begged them all to be seated.

Nina glanced about her. How much smaller the room seemed than in former days ; how much plainer the furniture ; how stiff and precise its arrangement — the very type of its mistress ; as beautifully neat and clean, too, as of yore ; the muslin curtains hung in exact folds, and were white as the driven snow, and not a speck of dust could be seen, even when Essie pushed open the half-closed shutters and let in the full light of the bright summer's day.

The young girl shivered at the thought of the life that would now be hers, had this continued to be her home ; and her heart thrilled with deep joy and thankfulness as her eyes again sought the face of him she so loved, and so delighted to call her "own, *own* father."

He read her thoughts in her speaking eyes, and his answering smile was full of tenderness and love.

"Shall I call mother?" whispered Essie, returning to Nina's side.

"Yes, dear, in a minute ; but tell me, first, if you are all well, and where are Ned and Belle, and your father and the rest."

"Father and Homer are gone back to the mill ; Sylvester is in a store in the city now ; mother's up-stairs ; and Ned and Belle are somewhere about the house. I'll hunt them up, if you want to see them."

"Presently, dear," said Nina, putting her arm around the child's waist, and making her sit on the sofa by her side ; "but tell me, first, did you get the dolls and other presents I sent you the first Christmas after I went away ? I hoped you would send me a little letter to say how you liked them ; but it never came."

Essie's eyes opened wide with amazement. "Did you send

them?" she cried. "Well, I never could guess how *mamma* came to spend so much money on us that Christmas; or why it seemed to vex her that we were all so pleased with the things. She was n't at home when father brought the box up from the cars, and he opened it right away; and we had the things in our hands when *mamma* came in. And I always supposed she was vexed because she wanted to be the first to show them to us. But now I guess it was mostly because you sent them; and may-be she would n't have let us have them at all, if she 'd been at home when they came."

Nina's lip curled with scorn and indignation. "No doubt," she said. "But have you missed me, *Essie*? you and Ned and *Belle*."

"Oh, yes, ever so much. But do tell me where you've been, and how you found your own father and brother?" whispered the child, with a shy glance at the two gentlemen, who, at a little distance, sat silently listening to the conversation.

But Nina's reply was prevented by the entrance of Mrs. Powell, who at that moment sailed in in a rustling silk; never dreaming whom she was honoring by such a display of her cherished finery.

As her eye fell upon Nina,—whom she instantly recognized, for time had made little change in the fair young creature, save in the rounding out and perfecting of the slight, graceful form, and of each lovely feature, and the enriching of the complexion with the glowing tints of exuberant health and happiness,—she stopped, and stood gazing at her like one struck dumb with astonishment; her face darkening with rage, her eye flashing with scorn and contempt. She saw no one else; and the neat travelling-dress, with its snowy linen collar and cuffs, though the very perfection of good taste and lady-like simplicity, told nothing of the rank and wealth of the wearer.

For a single instant the two looked into each other's eyes in utter silence; then Mrs. Powell's rage and indignation

found words. "Miserable, depraved creature," she cried, "how dare you enter my house, after the way in which you have behaved? after returning such base ingratitude for all my care and kindness? Begone this instant, and never—"

"Madam," interrupted Dr. Monteith, stepping to Nina's side, and taking her hand in his, "my daughter is here because I brought her; therefore let your anger and indignation expend themselves upon me. I have a little business matter to transact with you; it need occupy but a few moments; and when that has been satisfactorily arranged, we will take our departure, and trouble you no more."

His calm, quiet tones, his polite, gentlemanly address, and something in his appearance and his whole air and manner, that told of undoubted wealth and respectability, silenced the woman, and covered her with shame and confusion. She stammered out an apology, and, sitting down on the nearest chair, waited in silence for what further he might have to say.

He seated himself by Nina's side, still keeping her hand fast clasped in his, and passing his other arm about her waist. "This is my daughter," he said, in tones of fond, proud affection, his eyes resting with a look of indescribable tenderness upon the beautiful face; "my own darling child, whom God gave me some eighteen years ago. But she was stolen from me on the day of her birth; and until within a few days I believed that she slept in the grave with her mother. Now I have learned the truth, by the confession of the nurse, who was an accomplice in the commission of the crime; and Nina has told me the story of her life with your sister and yourself, and of the revelation made to you by Mrs. Clemmens, on her death-bed, and afterward by you to herself. The nurse has described to me the garments and ornaments worn by the babe at the time of its abduction. Nina remembers having seen such in your possession; no doubt committed to your care by your sister; and I have now come to ask for them, and for the note which you told Nina accompanied them; also for any further information in regard to the matter which you may

be able to furnish. I would like greatly to hear all that you can recall of your sister's account of the way in which the child came into her possession."

Mrs. Powell listened to his words with varying, and by no means agreeable, emotions. That Nina, whom she so cordially hated, should have arrived at so prosperous an estate, should have been proved of good birth and parentage, in spite of all her prognostications to the contrary, was as gall and wormwood to her proud, jealous, envious nature. Had it been in her power to dash the cup of happiness from the young girl's lips, by taking from her and her father the knowledge of their relationship, she would have done so without a moment's hesitation; and for the first time she bitterly repented of having revealed to Nina the secret that she was the child of Mr. and Mrs. Clemmens only by adoption.

On the other hand, ever anxious to raise herself and her children in the social scale, and plainly perceiving that Dr. Monteith was far above them in that respect, she greatly regretted that — since Nina was now known to be his child — she had not treated her in a manner to win her gratitude and affection, in order that she might now assist her in rising to the station she so coveted.

But the time for that had gone by. Nina would never forget or forgive her harshness, injustice, and oppression, or Dr. Monteith the cruel, insulting words she had but now addressed to his darling. So, seeing she could hope for nothing from them, she determined that they should gain nothing from her; but on the contrary, she would, as far as possible, gratify her avarice — next to ambition her ruling passion — at their expense.

With this resolve, recovering her self-possession, she assumed a cold, haughty, reserved demeanor. "There is very little to tell, sir," she replied, drawing herself up, and folding her arms with an air that said, as plainly as words, "And you will find it no easy task to get from me what there is."

"But there is something."

“Yes; that the child was found lying on the door-step of my brother-in-law’s house; that he carried it in and showed it to his wife, and they foolishly determined to adopt it in place of one they had just lost, instead of sending it to the poor-house as they should have done; that they did so, and treated it with an unwise indulgence that so fostered a naturally ungovernable temper, that when she came to me, at their death, she was already almost beyond control, and gave me more trouble than all my own five put together.”

“Mamma did not find me difficult to control, nor would you, if you had treated me with even tolerable kindness,” exclaimed Nina, with flashing eyes.

“I treated you better than you deserved,” said Mrs. Powell, coldly. “If I was strict, and sometimes a little severe, it was all intended for your good, and you ought to thank me for it; but rebellion and ingratitude were the only return you ever made for all my care and anxiety on your account, and all the added labor your presence in the family caused me.”

Nina was beginning an indignant rejoinder, but her father checked her.

“Hush, hush, my darling,” he said, softly; “do not degrade yourself by bandying words with the woman: it is beneath your dignity; and to return railing for railing is most unchristian.”

Then, turning to Mrs. Powell, he again requested that she would now restore to him everything in her possession that had belonged to his infant child.

“No,” she said. “I claim them as given to me by my sister; who certainly acquired a right to them by all the expense and trouble Nina was to her in those ten years.”

“Did Mrs. Clemmens make them over to you as an absolute gift, or merely in trust for Nina?” he asked, fixing his eyes searchingly upon her face.

She colored angrily. “They are mine,” she said, compressing her thin lips with an air of determination; “they are mine; and but a poor equivalent for all I have done for that

ungrateful girl, to say nothing of the expense she has been to us."

Mr. Powell entered the room as she finished her sentence. In their excitement, none of them had heard his approaching footsteps, and his wife looked up in surprise, as he stepped eagerly forward and took Nina's hand, exclaiming, "Why, my dear child, how do you do? and where did you come from?"

"Thomas!" cried his wife, reprovingly, and he dropped Nina's hand and turned away without waiting for her reply.

"I—I—what is it, my dear?" he stammered; "what was it you were saying as I came in?"

"What was I saying? Why, telling this man—he has n't condescended to tell me his name, but seems to consider it quite sufficient for me to know that he is Nina's father—that the baby-clothes, etc., that my sister gave me on her death-bed, belong, not to Nina, but to me; not only because they were Esther's gift, but that the trouble and expense we have gone to on account of that child are worth ten times what those paltry rags would sell for."

"I beg your pardon, madam, for forgetting to introduce myself; my name is Monteith," said the doctor. And then he quietly asked, "What was the yearly sum paid over to you for Nina's support by the trustees of the property bequeathed her by her adopted parents?"

"'T was n't any regular sum: they just paid the bills, whatever they happened to come to—sometimes more, sometimes less," stammered Mr. Powell; while his wife, giving him a furious look, said, "Whatever it was, that makes no difference in the rights of the thing; for my sister's property ought to have come to me—her nearest relation."

"I cannot see that," replied Dr. Monteith, quietly; "your sister and her husband had undoubtedly the right to leave their property to whomsoever they pleased. But as I am by no means willing that my daughter should lie under the smallest obligation—real or fancied—to one who could speak to



and of her as you have done in my hearing to-day, I will pay for her maintenance during the time that she was an inmate of your house. Bring me the articles I have asked for, then make out your bill, and I will give you a check on my Philadelphia banker."

"She was with us five years," said Mrs. Powell, with the eager look of one about to pounce upon a treasure.

"Not quite," interrupted Nina.

"Never mind, we will call it five," said the doctor.

"Then say three hundred a year; it will come to fifteen hundred dollars," added Mrs. Powell, greedily.

The doctor's face expressed supreme contempt for her meanness and cupidity. He knew perfectly well, from the accounts Nina had from time to time given him of their mode of life, and her scanty clothing, that—entirely setting aside the value of the child's services, as well as the fact that her expenses had been already amply repaid in money—the woman was now asking nearly double the amount of all that had been expended on Nina during those five years.

Mr. Powell, who was watching the doctor's face narrowly, read his thoughts in its expression. "It is too much, Comfort; and he is business man enough to know it," he whispered, putting his lips close to his wife's ear. "'Half a loaf is better than no bread,' and we must say something less. My wife is a little wrong in her arithmetic," he added, aloud; "suppose we say two hundred a year."

"Very well," said Dr. Monteith; "when you have placed those articles in my hands you may bring me writing materials, and I will make out a check for one thousand."

There was a gleam of exultation in Mrs. Powell's eyes as she rose and left the room, turning on the threshold to give her husband a warning look.

He received it with a meek expression, but the instant she was gone, his countenance brightened, and drawing near to Nina, he again took her hand, saying in a kindly tone, "Well, my dear, I'm right glad to see that you're prospering: you

know you were always a favorite of mine ; only, for peace sake, I had to rather keep it to myself before her," motioning with his head in the direction of the door through which his better half had just vanished.

"Yes, you were always kind to me," replied Nina, bestowing upon him one of her sweet, winning smiles.

"And so you've really found your own father?" he said, glancing at Dr. Monteith. "How in the world did you manage that?"

"She did not manage it, nor I," said the doctor, answering for his daughter; "but God, in his good providence, brought us together, taught us to love one another, and at length revealed to us our true relationship."

Essie had gone in search of Ned and Belle, and Nina was listening eagerly for their coming; but instead, Mrs. Powell's returning footsteps were heard, and her spouse hastily retreated to the farther side of the room, and meekly sat him down upon the chair on which she had left him.

She came in, carrying a small wooden box, which she deposited on the table and unlocked with a key that she took from her pocket.

Dr. Monteith's face grew momentarily paler, as she proceeded to lift out one article after another and spread them before him. The handkerchief and the ornaments she placed in his hands.

One glance was sufficient; he recognized them. A deep sigh burst from his pale, quivering lips.

Ernest and Nina had drawn near, and were looking on with intense interest. Nina's eyes filled, and in her quick, impulsive way she caught the handkerchief from her father's hand and pressed it to her lips, then threw her arms around his neck with a passionate burst of weeping. "Oh, if she could only come back! my own dear, dear *mother!*" she sobbed.

"No, darling, do not wish that; she does not, dearly as she loves us."

"She cannot return to us, but we shall go to her," murmured Ernest, softly.

Mr. Powell sat watching them with a look of keen sympathy, his wife with a contemptuous curl of her lip.

"Thomas, why do you sit gaping there?" she asked, severely; "if you cared to attend to your own affairs, you'd be hunting up writing materials; they'll be wanted presently."

"Oh, yes, of course, of course, my dear. I'll bring them at once," he said, starting up in confusion and hurrying from the room.

"Bring a newspaper, too, to wrap these things in," she called after him; "the box and towels belong to me."

"Pitifully mean as ever," thought Nina.

But at that moment Essie came softly in and, paying no heed to her mother's frown, which she did not seem to see, put her arms lovingly around Nina. "I could not find the children," she said. "I believe they've gone off to school, and I'm so sorry. Ned talks of you yet, and he will have a good cry when he hears that he has missed seeing you."

Mr. Powell returned with the articles he had been sent for, and spreading out the newspaper, Mrs. Powell was about to wrap the infant's clothing in it, but Nina sprang forward and prevented her. "No, let me do it," she said, hastily pushing her aside; for she felt that the touch of her dead mother's fingers had hallowed each little garment, and that Mrs. Powell's would pollute them.

"As you please, miss; it is quite immaterial to me," replied the latter, stiffly. Then turning to Dr. Monteith, "Will you write the check now?" she asked, with a wave of her hand toward the table where the writing materials were placed in readiness.

Bowing a silent assent, he rose and complied with her request. She clutched the check eagerly as he handed it to her, scanned it attentively for a moment, to make sure there was no deception, then, with a bland smile, remarked, "You

must be very wealthy to part with your money so easily; and to be able to deck wife and child in such costly finery as that," she added, with a motion of her head toward the bundle on Nina's lap.

"Are you not satisfied with what I have given you?" he asked, with cool contempt.

"I ask no more from you, though I might have reminded you of the interest this money would have brought during all these years," she answered, unblushingly; "but as you will have plenty to leave your children, and I have little or nothing to give mine, I think it would be no more than fair that Nina should return my sister's property to me. Esther would never have left it to her if she could have foreseen all this."

"Perhaps not," he replied, while Nina, springing to her feet, cried out, impetuously, "You shall have it back! I told you long ago I should never touch another farthing of it, and I never will! Father, can we not make it all over to her now?"

"Not all in a moment, daughter," he said, gently. "You have no power to dispose of the property until it is placed in your hands on your coming of age. Mrs. Powell, you need have no fear that I will counsel my daughter to retain a dollar of your brother-in-law's money. And now, as our business is concluded, we will take our departure. Are you ready, Nina?"

"Yes, sir—but," and she turned to Mr. Powell,— "I would like to see old Peggy for a moment, if I may."

"She's dead and buried long ago," said Mrs. Powell, shortly, answering for her husband.

Nina looked shocked, and was moving toward the door, when Essie threw her arms around her with a cry, "Oh, Nina, Nina, don't go yet! stay a little longer. Will you ever, ever come back again?"

"I think not, dear," she said, returning the child's caress with tears in her eyes; "I think not, little Essie; but if you can persuade your mother to let you pay a visit to Wald,—

my beautiful country home near Philadelphia,— I shall be delighted to see you."

She looked inquiringly at Mrs. Powell, but the latter made no reply ; and with a cold " Good-afternoon," they parted.

" What could you have been thinking of, Comfort, not to catch at such a chance as that for our little girl?" exclaimed Mr. Powell, looking regretfully after the carriage as it rolled away.

It was only for the moment that her hatred to Nina gained the better of her worldly wisdom, and she was already regretting it as keenly as he did ; but a reproof from such a quarter was not to be borne, and turning sharply upon him, she demanded : " Is it possible, Thomas Powell, you could for a moment imagine that I would sacrifice my child's spiritual interests to her temporal, by exposing her to the contamination of that girl's society? No ; I hope I am far too good and faithful a Christian mother for that."

She swept past him into the sitting-room, where the dinner-table still stood as she left it half an hour before, and began energetically piling up the dishes.

He followed her with an uneasy look on his face.

" Comfort," he said, in an undertone, standing close at her elbow, " they will doubtless go on now to Oakdale, see Mr. Lancaster and Dr. Blake, and — and then it will all come out."

" Well, what if it does? who cares?" she asked, turning fiercely upon him, but with a blanching cheek : " the money was mine of right; and did n't she tell me she'd never touch a cent of it?"

" That's the way it appears to us ; but everybody might not see it in that light," he answered, with a cowering, troubled look. " I'm afraid we have n't acted according to law ; and — and it would be a bad business for us if they should see fit to prosecute."

## CHAPTER XLVI.

## OAKDALE.

**Y**ES, there it is, my dear old home! looking just as it did when I left it almost eight years ago!" And Nina's lovely face looked eagerly from the window as the carriage rolled rapidly down the familiar road, and drew up before the little white gate in front of Oakdale farmhouse. "Just as it did, except that everything seems to have grown smaller," she repeated, as her father assisted her to alight.

The door opened, Kizzie rushed out, and the two ran into each other's arms.

"Kizzie, you dear old Kizzie! you have not changed one bit; you are just what you were when Mrs. Powell carried me off from you!" cried Nina, in an ecstasy of delight.

"Well, I think you'll take that back when you've looked a little harder," returned Kizzie, kissing her and crying over her; "and I can't say the same of you, for you went away a forlorn little child, half broken-hearted, and you've come back the beautifullest and happiest-lookin' young woman I ever sot eyes on. Let me take a good look at ye." And she held her off at arm's length, gazing into the fair face with so ardent an admiration, that it sparkled all over with smiles and blushes.

"Were you expecting us?" asked Nina. "Oh, I must not forget to make you acquainted with my father and brother; my very own they are, Kizzie."

"Yes, I know. Dr. Blake he brought the letter over and read it to me," said Kizzie, putting her toil-hardened hand into Dr. Monteith's, as he held it out with a cordial smile; "and so I was expectin' you. I've been on the lookout ever since mornin'. How d' ye do, sir, how d' ye do?" to the

doctor and his son. "I'm as pleased as can be to see you, every one of you. Just walk right into the parlor. Nina knows the way, don't you, dearie? My, but it does my heart good to see your bright face in these rooms again! And what wonderful news that letter brought! I could hardly sleep a wink all night for thinking of it, though Jones was snorin' away by my side as if he meant to do the job for the two of us."

"You are married, Kizzie?" said Nina, inquiringly, bringing her eyes back to her old friend's face, after an eager wandering over the familiar furniture. "I was so glad to hear that you were back in the old home again."

"Yes; I took a husband and six children about a year back," was the nonchalant reply. "You see, the poor things would have had to be scattered among strangers, and I felt so sorry for 'em that, as Jones was n't noways disagreeable to me,—sober and honest, and a good provider,—I concluded I'd come and take care on 'em when he asked me.

"It looks pretty much as it did when she was alive, don't it?" she asked, following Nina's glance as it wandered around the room. "You know the old furniture was stacked away in the garret for you, when you come of age; and when I heard you was comin', I had a good bit of it brought down and sot in the old places."

"Oh, thank you! how very kind! but it must have given you a great deal of trouble."

"Not so much, neither," replied Kizzie, taking Nina's hat and pushing forward for her use the large easy-chair in which Mrs. Clemmens had passed so many weary hours during her last sickness; "for we have n't so much of our own but what we could easy crowd it into two or three rooms."

"Kizzie," said Nina, "you must keep this that was left to me."

"No, indeed, child! do you think I would rob you?" was the almost indignant rejoinder. "Mrs. Powell did enough of that, to my thinking."

“But, then, all I want with it is to see it standing here as it stood in the old times,” said Nina, earnestly; “and I hope to do so often; for I shall pay many a little visit in the future, if father will allow me to come.”

“I will not refuse so reasonable a request,” said Dr. Monteith, smiling fondly upon her.

“Well, then, I’ll take the best of care of it, and thank you a thousand times, too, for the use of it,” said Kezia, evidently much pleased with the offer. “Would you like to go up to your rooms? I’ve fixed up your own old room for you, Nina,—excuse me, p’raps I had ought to say Miss Monteith?”

“No, no; I shall always be Nina to you, Kizzie.”

“Thank you, that comes the most natural to me. Well, as I was sayin’, I’ve fixed up your old room for you just like it used to be; and the best chamber for the gentlemen.”

Nina hardly waited to hear the conclusion of the sentence, but flew up to her room, leaving the others to follow at a more leisurely pace.

“You’re just the same old story, wild and frisky as a kitten,” said Kezia, coming in after her, and catching her in her arms for another hug and kiss. “Well, does it look like old times?”

“Yes,” said Nina, laughing and crying both together; “it’s like the rest of the house, the same and not the same,—smaller and plainer than of old, but just as neat and sweet and pretty. Oh, it makes me feel as if she must be here, somewhere; are you sure she’s not?” And the beautiful face was hidden on Kezia’s breast in a burst of passionate weeping.

Yet it lasted but a moment. Kezia’s rough hand was passed, with gentle, soothing movement, over the soft curls but two or three times ere the head was raised again, and the bright drops were dashed away.

“There! I shall not shed another tear to make my dear father think I am unhappy,” she said. “Oh, Kizzie, you do



not know what a father he is to me—how dear, how kind, how good!”

“Yes, I guess I do. One look into his face would tell me that. Now, dearie, I’m going down to put your supper on the table, and you’ll all just please to come to it whenever you’re ready.”

Kezia had not forgotten Nina’s tastes or lost one whit of her old skill in cooking, and the meal they presently sat down to was one fit for a king.

The sun was still an hour high when they rose from the table, and Kezia, leaving the clearing away to the eldest of her step-daughters, conducted her visitors over the house and grounds, which Nina was eager to see and to show to her father and brother. Then they bent their steps to the village graveyard, where Kezia pointed out to them the last resting-place of Mr. and Mrs. Clemmens. The ground had filled up so much in the past eight years that Nina would have had some difficulty in searching out the spot herself.

She shed a few quiet tears as they stood about it, then, slipping her hand into her father’s arm, allowed him to lead her away, though once or twice she looked back and gave a sigh to the memory of those who had made her early years so bright and happy. She asked for Mrs. Croft’s grave, too, and Kezia pointed it out, and told of her peaceful death.

On returning to the house, they found Dr. Blake waiting to see them.

He met Nina with all the old cordiality, and gave Dr. Monteith a detailed account of all that he knew of her first arrival at Oakdale. He could not say what hand had laid her on the doorstep where Mr. Clemmens had found her.

He had hardly finished his story when Mr. Lancaster, the other trustee, was announced. A long business conversation ensued, in which Dr. Monteith learned that his letter, received two days before, had given them the first intimation that Nina was not still living with Mr. and Mrs. Powell, who had continued to draw the money for her support at regular

intervals,—for that purpose sending on bills for clothing, board, etc.,—as during the five previous years.

The two trustees were highly indignant at the cheat, and strongly inclined to prosecute the offenders to the full extent of the law. But Dr. Monteith dissuaded them from it, saying he would rather they should be allowed to escape; the loss was as nothing to Nina, who intended to deed the property to the Powells, as the nearest relatives to those who had willed it to her; and as such she would shield them from even merited disgrace.

Dr. Blake and his co-executor yielded under protest, and contented themselves with a strong expression of their opinion of such conduct, given to the delinquents in the form of a joint letter, intrusted to the mails a day or two later.

“If that Comfort Powell a’n’t the meanest woman alive! who would ever think she was Mrs. Clemmens’ sister?” exclaimed Kezia, as she followed Nina to her room to see that she had everything she wanted for the night.

“Oh, Kezia, you don’t know anything about it,” said Nina; “if you had spent five years with her, you might. Poor, dear mamma, she little knew what a home she provided for me in committing me to her care.”

A long talk followed, in which, by comparing notes, they learned more of the woman’s treachery in regard to letters, &c., than either had known before.

The next morning found the Monteiths again on the wing. They were in too great haste to tarry longer at Oakdale, and all Kezia’s entreaties could not keep them another day. But the promise of a second and longer visit from Nina, within the year, comforted her not a little.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

## THE SPOILER SPOILED.

A WOMAN stood before an open window, looking down upon a fair and beautiful landscape. A broad and noble river — its waters rippling in the breeze and sparkling in the golden light of the summer's sun — threaded its way between grand old mountains and richly wooded hills. Handsome country-seats and pretty little villages, scattered here and there, adorned its banks or nestled in the shadow of the hills and forests, while the nearer view was of a velvety lawn dotted with noble old trees and traversed by a broad carriage-way, and of terraces gay with many colored flowers, that filled the air with their delicious perfume.

The sullen gloom of the woman's face was in striking contrast to the brightness and beauty without. She gazed but a moment, then turning hastily away, with a gesture of disgust, let fall a curtain of heavy damask, shutting out at once the sweet air, the glad sunshine, and all the pleasant sights and sounds that but now had greeted her eye and ear.

“I hate them!” she muttered, pacing to and fro in the darkened room, with clinched hands and tumultuously heaving breast; “I hate all this light, this gladness and beauty. I would cast a pall over the whole earth if I could, and make every mortal creature as utterly wretched as my miserable self. How dare they be so full of life and gladness when he, the idol of my heart, lies mouldering in the grave? What have I done that I should be tortured thus? Purgatory — hell itself could hardly add to my torments! and she — she who has robbed me of him — she is young, happy, and beloved; has all that heart could wish. Oh, for the power to crush her, trample her into the very dust, as I would a

worm that crossed my path and lifted its puny head against me!" And she ground her heel on the carpet and clinched her teeth with impotent rage.

"Hark! what was that? Who comes to disturb me in the seclusion of my bereavement?" she muttered, as the sound of wheels came to her ear. And again drawing aside the curtain, she looked out.

A carriage was coming up the drive, had almost reached the house, and, as she gazed, it turned and drew up before the front entrance. The roof and pillars of the porch, and the spreading branches of a tree, prevented her from seeing who alighted from it; but she cared little for that, seeing she was determined to receive no one, either friend or foe. She turned away, and resumed her walk and her bitter thoughts.

"Madame," said a lady's maid, opening the door, "a gentleman wishes to see you on business."

"A gentleman? who?"

"He gave no name, madame."

"I see no one on business but my lawyer. Is it he?"

"I think not, madame; and I did my best to send him away, telling him that, being plunged in deep sorrow, you saw no one; but he will not be denied: he asserts that his business is of the utmost importance, cannot even be delayed, and that he must and will have a personal interview."

An angry exclamation broke from the lips of the mistress; yet her curiosity was aroused; who could this pertinacious stranger be? She would see him, since there seemed to be no getting rid of him without.

"Bring me my cap, Martin," she said; "and see that my dress is all in order. The man is a gentleman, you say?"

"Undoubtedly, madame; no one could question that, after the first glance. I should say he was a distinguished person—a man of wealth and standing in society."

"Did you show him into the drawing-room?" asked the mistress, glancing at the reflection of her sallow visage and faded, sunken features in the glass, as her maid carefully ad-

justed the widow's cap over her iron-gray hair, and arranged the folds of her deep mourning dress.

"I did, madame; no one possessed of the least sense or discernment could think of showing a gentleman of his appearance anywhere else."

"There, that will do, Martin; a simple reply to my question was all that was called for. Open the door for me."

The tone was commanding, her gesture imperious; and as the servant obeyed, she left the room with a soft, noiseless, gliding step, that reminded one of a serpent,—and which long habit had made second nature to her,—passed down the broad staircase, across the wide entrance-hall, and entered the spacious drawing-room beyond.

The first sight that there met her eyes was a charming vision of youth and beauty; a slight, graceful, girlish figure and a face of matchless loveliness; at that moment radiant with the delight which a true lover of nature feels in gazing upon such a landscape as lay spread out before the open window beside which she was standing.

A low exclamation of mingled surprise, anger, and alarm burst from the lips of the mistress of the mansion; and the sweet, fair girl, starting at the sound, turned, and meeting the look of deadly hate in the gleaming black eyes, shuddered involuntarily, and drew a step nearer to the young man at her side.

"Fear nothing," he whispered, encircling her with his arm, while at the same instant there rose up before "Madame" another face, pale, calm, resolute, — confronting her like the minister of avenging justice.

She started back, putting up both hands before her face as if to ward off a blow, while she trembled from head to foot, and her very lips grew white.

"You!" she said, in low, husky tones; "you, Clarence Ernest Monteith! what brings you here?"

"I come to bring your crimes home to you, Delilah Cra-

ven," he answered, with low, yet perfectly distinct utterance; "to accuse you as the murderer of my wife, the abductor of my children, the usurper of their inheritance."

"I think you will find your accusations hard to prove," she said, with a desperate effort to recover her composure. "Their inheritance! I a usurper! I have a better right to my brother's property than they, who have not the smallest claim to relationship."

"If Mr. Delacourt had died intestate, yes; but he had an undoubted right to bequeath to whom he would the property acquired by his own exertions; and you well know that his will left it to my wife and her surviving children."

"Her surviving children? Pray, produce them, and prove their identity," she cried, laughing a bitter, mocking laugh, but with the paleness of terror still on her cheek. "You yourself saw the one lying dead on her dead mother's breast; and the other had even then been in his grave for a year or more."

"Such was your story," replied Dr. Monteith, sternly; "but it was not the truth. You had given my son in exchange for the dead child of another, which you caused to be buried by Mr. Delacourt's side; announcing to us, and to all the friends, that it was our darling, whom you had taken away to Philadelphia, and left there alive and well. And though we buried a dead babe with its mother, there was also a living one—its twin sister—whom you secretly carried away and laid at the door of a New England farm house."

The woman staggered back, almost gasping for breath, and sank half fainting into a chair. "You cannot prove it; the story is utterly false," she said, hoarsely, while her hollow, gleaming eyes, full of fear and hate, wandered from one to another of the three faces confronting hers. "I defy you to prove it!"

"I have the proof at hand," he said. "Judy Flanagan's full confession, taken down from her own lips by a justice of the peace, and in the presence of competent witnesses; also

articles of clothing and ornaments worn by the children,—some of them marked with their initials. And here they stand before you, living witnesses to the falsity of your assertion that they died in infancy; their remarkable likeness to their parents furnishing strong proof of their identity."

"And yet I deny it!" she hissed between her clinched teeth. "Judy Flanagan has confessed a lie—perjured herself; for what bribe perhaps you can tell: initials are easily marked on clothes or ornaments, and remarkable likenesses have been found where there existed not the slightest tie of kindred. No, Ernest Monteith, I defy you still!" And rising, she stood proudly erect before him, with folded arms, firmly compressed lips, and eyes that blazed with fury, yet dared not meet the stern, steady gaze of his, but quickly sought the floor.

A death-like hush filled the room for an instant; then Dr. Monteith spoke, his calm, determined tones filling the guilty heart with fear.

"You then refuse to acknowledge your guilt, and to make such restitution as now lies in your power? You would do well to consider the alternative, Delilah Craven; summoned before a court of justice, tried by the laws of the land for these high crimes, your guilt proved by overwhelming evidence, you will find yourself condemned to the penitentiary for a long term of years; probably so long that death alone will bring you deliverance from your captivity."

"And pray what may be this overwhelming evidence?" she asked, with a scornful curl of her lip. "Methinks I have already disposed of it, and may, perchance, be able to produce counter evidence quite as satisfactory to a jury. The law is uncertain, Ernest Monteith, and wealth that can bribe witnesses and jurors, a tower of strength."

A slight, sorrowful smile flitted across the doctor's features.

"Your anger robs you of discretion," he said; "you are not wise thus to show me your weapons, and *such* weapons, too. But they will not avail against the unbroken chain of

evidence which I can produce, with Aunt Lettice, Judy Flanagan and her daughter, whose testimony will be conclusive in proof of your crime against Ernest and my murdered wife — whom you as truly slew as if you had stabbed her to the heart.”

His voice trembled with almost overpowering emotion as he pronounced these last words, and the woman's face assumed an ashen hue, though she still retained her proud bearing.

He paused an instant to recover himself; then went on, his voice growing sterner with every word. “Yes, Delilah Craven, her blood is on your hands, as is proved by Judy's testimony, and that of her grandson, whom you hired to frighten my horses, and then to hurry to Avonmore with the news of an accident to me —”

“Hush! hush! I am no murderess! I could not know that it would make her ill, or cause her death, if it did,” came in a whisper from the now pale and trembling lips, while her whole form shook like an aspen-leaf.

“No, but you hoped it might, intended that it should, were rejoiced that it did; you had laid your plans for such result, and proceeded to carry them out; the birth of twins, — one living, the other dead — and the utter exhaustion of the mother, enabling you to do so with an ease and entire success that you could hardly have hoped for. You carried away the living child: Judy can testify to that, and to the clothing and ornaments in which she herself arrayed it.”

“Traitor!” hissed the pale, quivering lips.

“That name will apply to more than one,” said the doctor, significantly; “a very Judas were you, Delilah Craven, to the fair, young creature your brother had loved so dearly, and for whom you professed so ardent an affection — her betrayer and murderer.”

“And what if I was!” she cried, again making a desperate effort to overcome her agitation, and reassume the proud and haughty bearing of one unjustly accused; “had I no provo-



cation in the loss of my inheritance? did no good motives actuate me? The church teaches that the end sanctifies the means: the property that should have fallen to me was in the hands of heretics, who would use it against the true church. If I recovered it, I could not only prevent that mischief, but would have it in my power to do much for her advancement; and I have done so.

“And if I am a murderess, what is she?” she asked, suddenly pointing to Nina, and flashing upon her a look so full of hatred and malice that Ernest involuntarily tightened his clasp about the slender waist which his arm still encircled, and Dr. Monteith started and moved nearer to his darling.

“You need not fear,” cried the woman, mockingly; “I have no concealed weapon, though it may be well for her and for you that I have none; for God knows that my hatred to her is such that I would trample her in the dust, trample the last breath of life out of her body, if I could; for has she not robbed me of my son? my heart’s idol, the last of my children, the only one that I had left in the wide world to love or care for me; the only one in whose veins flowed one drop of my blood!”

As she poured out these words with rapid, vehement utterance, her countenance expressed the most intense anguish, and she wrung her hands with a gesture of bitter grief and despair. “Yes, he is dead, dead, dead!” she wailed; “my boy, my Wilfred, my only son, the jewel of my heart, the light of my eyes, dead, dead, and mouldering beneath the sod; and she, *she* has done it. May the bitter, blasting curse of a broken-hearted mother follow her to her life’s end, and into the very grave itself!”

Utter bewilderment and unfeigned astonishment sat on the face of each of her auditors. Nina’s had grown deadly pale, and, clinging convulsively about her brother’s neck, “What, what can she mean?” she murmured. “How can I have done such a deed? I who never even knew that she had a son?”

“How?” cried the woman, fiercely; “how? Did not your hand strike the blow that forever robbed those glorious eyes of sight? did not weeks of untold agony follow, and the terrible inflammation bring on the wasting fever that laid him in his grave?”

A light broke upon the minds of her hearers. Nina still clung to her brother, still kept her face hidden on his shoulder; but she breathed more freely. True, it was a horrible thought that she had caused the death of a human creature, and one who, in all probability, was ill prepared to stand in the presence of his Judge; but it had been done in lawful self-defence, and his blood must rest on his own head.

It was Dr. Monteith who replied. “I am sorry for your loss and your grief; yet Wilfred’s death was but the just retribution for his own and his mother’s crimes; and do you not see how your own words are adding fresh links to the chain of evidence against you? If it was your son who seized the bridle of my daughter’s pony on the high-road, does not that furnish strong presumptive proof that you were concerned in the attempted abduction?”

“And I have recognized you; the moment you entered the room I recognized you as the woman who has haunted me all my life,” said Nina, for the first time addressing Mrs. Craven. “Father, it was she who threw the opiate into my drink that night; she who met me in the woods in the guise of a gypsy fortune-teller; she who stood at the library window, peering at me through the darkness with her evil eyes, so full of hatred and revenge.”

“I knew it,” he said; “I have felt sure of it ever since I heard Judy Flanagan’s confession. Doubtless she was ignorant of some of this woman’s evil deeds; but she told me that the anonymous note conveyed to you so mysteriously was written by Mrs. Craven, and carried to you by her own grandson.

“And Mary Haggerty, too, has confessed that for years you have kept her in your pay to watch my daughter and keep

you informed of her whereabouts," he added, again addressing Mrs. Craven. "I have also found the man who conveyed you, in his wagon, from the cottage then occupied by Judy to a spot within sight of Mr. Clemmens' farm-house, and who, unknown to you, and probably unsuspected by you, watched you until you had entered the gate with the babe still in your arms. So, you perceive, there is not a link missing in the chain of evidence against you: Judy's confession revealing your plot, and how it was carried out in the attempt to cause an accident to my carriage and horses, and the frightening of my wife into convulsions by the false report that I was injured; also the fact of the birth of twins, one living and the other dead; your conveying away of the former of the two; and in what clothes and ornaments she herself had arrayed it. Then the man's evidence as to where he set you down; after that the testimony of several persons concerning the discovery of the child, a few moments later, on that very doorstep; and her adoption by Mr. and Mrs. Clemmens. Mrs. Powell's story of the imparting of the secret to her by her dying sister, and the little bundle of clothing — corresponding to Judy's description of what the child had on when you conveyed it away — kept by Mrs. Powell until three days ago, when it came into my possession.

"And besides all this, Nina's own recollections of you as one who has haunted her all her life. Mary Haggerty's testimony that, hired by you for the purpose, she had watched the child from place to place; and lastly, the several attempts you yourself have made by force or fraud to rob me a second time of my child. Pray, what did you intend to do with her, had you succeeded?"

"Consign her to a convent, whence she could never have escaped," answered the woman, with another flashing glance of hatred, directed at Nina, out of her fierce, black eyes; "and but for the terrible sufferings of Wilfred, I would have tried again and again till success must have crowned my persevering efforts."

“And this, too, you would excuse by the teachings of your church?” he asked, bitterly, and with a look of stern indignation.

“Yes; ‘the end sanctifies the means.’ I would have prevented a marriage with her brother, which I feared would come about. I would have forced her into the true church; thus saving her soul by the destruction of her earthly happiness; and it would have been a good and pious deed. Thank God, our convents are not open to the inspection of the officers of the law, or to the curious, prying eyes of the public—well kept at bay by thick stone walls and iron gates and bars; and your petted darling, once safe behind them, you would never have been able to discover her hiding-place; and we could have taken our own means for her forcible conversion. I can never forgive myself for the insane folly that kept me from putting her there in the first place, and thus forever effectually concealing her very existence from you.”

She poured out these words in the mad fury of utter despair, for she saw that she was entirely in the power of him whom she had so deeply wronged: there was no escape from the dire consequences of her now discovered crimes.

And having thus given full vent to the rage and hatred that were consuming her, but had no longer power to harm those against whom they were directed, she sank down into the low, cushioned chair behind her, crouching and cowering like one who expects a mortal blow.

“And this is what you call the religion of Christ?” said Dr. Monteith, with slow, distinct utterance; “this doing evil that good may come! Nay, it is utterly opposed to his teachings and his spirit.”

She made no reply, nor so much as raised her head or moved from her crouching posture. She seemed like one completely crushed by terror and despair.

Ernest had drawn his sister to a seat upon the sofa, and their father paced slowly to and fro across the spacious apartment, in which, for some moments, a death-like silence reigned.

It was broken at length by the wretched culprit.

“Wreak your vengeance upon me, Ernest Monteith,” she said, in accents of sullen despair; “hurl the hot thunderbolts of your wrath—just, as you no doubt deem it—at my devoted head. I am weary of waiting for them; let them come, that I may know the worst. I can scarce suffer more in the future than I have in the past—the long, dreary months that I have spent in mourning over the untimely end of him who was my all. Do your worst; you can add but little to the woes that are already crushing me to the earth—sinking me to the grave. This house has been a prison since he died: the wealth that I risked so much to secure, far more for him than for myself, is worthless to me now. So do your worst.”

He came and stood before her, speaking in the calm, quiet tone that, with him, expressed intensity of emotion, restrained by a strong and resolute will.

“I desire not to add to the woes which I see are already more than you can bear; for I have been praying God for grace to forgive as I would be forgiven—to forgive the wrongs to wife and children, tenfold bitterer to me than my own. The true religion of Christ is one of forgiveness, forbearance, and love. I have therefore no revenge to take. Confession and restitution, so far as it lies in your power, are all that I require.”

“And why a confession? You cannot absolve me from guilt; and you have already proof enough. I acknowledge that I know these to be your children and Nina’s. Is not that sufficient?”

“No. I require a written confession of your crimes against my wife and children, and an acknowledgment of the identity of the latter, signed by your own hand; and I want it at once.”

“You are cruel. I could not hold a pen at this moment, and to write out such a paper as you demand, would be utterly impossible.”

“It may be written by another at your dictation. I am in momentary expectation of the arrival of my solicitor, who may choose to act as your amanuensis. If he does not, my son will do you that service. Shall I ring for writing materials? or shall we adjourn to the library?”

“As you please; you are now master here.”

“Then we will go there,” he said, offering her the support of his arm.

But she rejected it, though trembling so violently as to be obliged to steady herself by the furniture and the wall several times ere the short journey was accomplished.

Ernest and Nina looked about them with eager curiosity as they followed their father and Mrs. Craven down the wide entrance-hall and into the library,—a large, luxuriously furnished apartment; its walls lined with well-filled book-cases and cabinets of curiosities, and its windows commanding a magnificent view of mountain and river.

In the embrasure of one of these, on a softly-cushioned divan, the two placed themselves side by side.

“Let us sit here and enjoy this glorious prospect,” said Ernest. “I suppose it is not necessary that we should hear the repetition of that woman’s confession of her evil deeds; and here we are out of ear-shot, yet near enough to be summoned if we are wanted.”

The blinds of all the other windows were partly closed, admitting only a subdued light, and leaving the greater part of the room in shadow.

Mrs. Craven had sought out its darkest corner, and, sinking back into the depths of a large easy-chair, turned her face from the light.

Dr. Monteith paced to and fro for a moment, his mournful eyes taking in one after another each old familiar object; for the room had not been refurnished, or altered in any way, since the death of its former mistress, and memory recalled many a little scene there enacted in which she, the loved and lost, had borne a part.

“Look at father,” whispered Nina. “I think I never saw his dear, kind, noble face so pale and sorrowful.”

“And no wonder,” returned Ernest, in the same low tone. “How everything here must remind him of her — our dear, young mother; of her and of her sad fate.”

The door-bell rang as he spoke, and the next moment a servant appeared, announcing the arrival of another gentleman, and asking, “Shall I bring him in here?”

“Yes,” said Dr. Monteith.

The man stared, and glanced at Mrs. Craven, as much as to say he expected his orders from her.

But she neither moved nor spoke, and Dr. Monteith repeated, in an authoritative tone, “Show him in here at once.”

The servant retreated, muttering sullenly to himself, and presently returned, ushering in an elderly gentleman, of legal aspect, whom he announced as “Mr. Tibbet, from Philadelphia.”

Dr. Monteith stepped forward, and the two shook hands, and exchanged a few words in an undertone.

Then Mr. Tibbet bowed stiffly to Mrs. Craven, with more affability to the young lady and gentleman, and, drawing up a chair to a table furnished with writing materials, seated himself with a business air that seemed to say, “We must go to work at once; I have not a moment to spare.”

All eyes were turned upon Mrs. Craven; but hers determinately sought the carpet, while her lips were firmly compressed, and her face was white and rigid.

“Madam,” said the lawyer, “you cannot fail to see that the doctor has you entirely in his power; better make a virtue of necessity, and let us have a full and free confession at once; beginning, if you please, with the transaction between yourself and a certain woman of the lower class, in which you exchanged the little Ernest, Dr. Monteith’s living son, for the dead child of another.”

As he spoke, he spread a sheet of paper on the table before him, selected a pen and dipped it in the ink.

She neither lifted her eyes nor changed her attitude in the least, but began at once, and in a low, hard, unwilling tone repeated the story of fraud and crime already familiar to our readers. She told it briefly, and without any sign of emotion — coldly, hardly, as if she were telling of the guilt of another, in which she had had no share.

When she had finished, the lawyer read to her what he had written, asking if it was all correct.

She said it was.

Martin and the housekeeper were then called in. Mrs. Craven signed the paper in their presence, and they added their signatures as witnesses. They retired, exchanging wondering glances and whispered questions, which neither was able to answer.

“Something quite out o’ the common is going on, that’s certain,” remarked the housekeeper. “And it’s plain that she’s in sore trouble, too. But, dear me, we needn’t care! If one of us was to drop down dead, it would hardly cost her a second thought. Hark! what’s going on at that side door? I must see to it.”

She hurried away, while Martin walked majestically upstairs, much too dignified to indulge in curiosity regarding “servants’ squabbles.”

At the side entrance a bright-looking, neatly-dressed mulatto girl, with a lad of the same color, and a darker-hued, middle-aged woman at her back, was claiming admittance; which Patrick seemed much inclined to refuse.

“What’s wrong, Patrick? What do you wish, miss?” asked the housekeeper, drawing near.

The girl dropped a curtsy.

“If you please, ma’am, I’m Rose Johnson — Miss Monteith’s maid; and these” (turning to her companions) “is my brother Dolph and old Wilet Smith, that the doctor disengaged for cook, and ordered us to come on in the pursuing train; which we’ve done. And now this sassy Irish fellow don’t want to let us in.”



“But, really, I don’t understand what your doctor’s or your young lady’s servants are doing here,” returned the housekeeper, with a look of surprise.

“‘Cause it’s the doctor’s house,” cried Rose, impetuously. “Your Mrs. Craven she got it by cheatin’ an’ lyin’, an’ carryin’ off the doctor’s children, an’ sayin’ they was dead when they was n’t. But now it’s all found out on her, an’ she’s got to give up, an’ may-be go to jail, too. Though the doctor’s so good I don’t believe he ’ill send her thar, bad as she desarves it.”

Unbounded astonishment sat on the face of each listener; they fell back, and the new-comers passed in and made themselves at home without further trouble.

Meanwhile, Lawyer Tibbet was giving his undivided attention to the weightier matters under consideration in the library. Mrs. Craven had delivered up the keys, including those of the secretary, containing the private papers of the late Mr. Delacourt, and the three gentlemen were busied in the examination of the will, certificates of stocks, bonds, mortgages, deeds, &c., &c.

“All right; nothing missing; everything just as it was when we resigned the property to Mrs. Craven,” exclaimed the lawyer, at length, rubbing his hands together with an air of great satisfaction. “I congratulate you, madam, on the aptitude for business you have shown in your management of the estate. You have spent nothing but the income, I see; but that is very large, and you had no right to it; you ought to refund; the doctor here might compel you to do so.”

“No, he could not; for I am nearly penniless,” she answered, with a cold, bitter look of defiance; “my brother’s annuity—a petty six hundred a year—is all I have left; and as I have now no living heir, that too reverts to his children at my death. My unnatural brother left me no power to will it away, else they should never touch a penny of it. And it will be but a drop in the ocean of the wealth of the owner

of Avonmore and Wald," she added, fairly gnashing her teeth with rage at the thought.

"Mr. Delacourt's sister shall not suffer from want while it is in my power to supply her need," said Dr. Monteith.

"I accept no favors from my enemies, Ernest Monteith," she interrupted, fiercely; "and a home is already provided for me. I shall retire at once to a convent, and there spend my few remaining days. Have you now done with heaping humiliations and reproaches upon me? If so, I will leave this house this hour, this moment, never to set foot in it again."

She rose and stood erect, steadying her trembling form by grasping the back of a chair, while once more she sent a flashing glance of impotent rage and hate from one face to another of the little group before her. Ernest and Nina had come forward to the table. The fair girl shuddered, and clung to her father's arm.

"Fear nothing, darling," he whispered in her ear. Then turning to Mrs. Craven, "You are not going on foot?" he said; "you are scarcely able to stand. And you have had no dinner. Wait, and let me order some refreshment for you, and the carriage, that you may go away as comfortably as possible."

"Dinner! It would choke me!" she cried, passionately. "Touch a morsel of food belonging to *you*, or set foot in *your* carriage, Ernest Monteith? Never while I live! I would sooner drop down and die in the road. And what matter if I should? who is there to mourn my loss, or shed one tear over my dead body?"

The tone of the last words was indescribably bitter and hopeless; and, waving them angrily from her path, she swept out of the room—passion and strong will for the moment supplying the lack of strength.

But Dr. Monteith stepped quickly after her.

"Listen one moment, Mrs. Craven," he said.

"Let me go!" she cried, again angrily waving him aside. "What more would you with me? Am I not al-

ready sufficiently humiliated? Is there aught more for you to strip me of?"

"I will not insult you with further offers of anything you might deem a favor," he answered; "but, as a physician, allow me to warn you against exposing yourself, in your present mental and physical condition, to the rays of this burning July sun. The hired hack which brought Mr. Tibbet is still here; take it, and I will see that he is supplied with another conveyance."

"I tell you I will walk! My own two feet shall carry me away from this, my lawful inheritance, of which you have robbed me!" she cried, in the same fierce tone as before, and glaring on him like a tigress at bay.

At the sound of the opening of the library-door, the servants had all come flocking into the hall; and even Martin was already half-way down the stairs, dignity well-nigh forgotten in overpowering curiosity.

"Pack my trunks instantly, Martin, and follow me with them to the 'American House' in the village!" commanded her mistress, turning haughtily to her.

"Yes, madame," replied the maid. "But you are not going to walk there through this burning hot sun?"

"It is your place neither to question nor to dictate," returned her mistress, more haughtily than before. "Bring me my bonnet and sunshade; and keep your advice till it is asked for."

A fierce, sweeping glance of the fiery eyes seemed to direct the latter clause of the sentence to all present; and no one offered any further remonstrance. They stood in silence there till Martin came running down with the required articles; tied on the bonnet, adjusted the heavy crape veil over the ghastly face, and put the sunshade into the shaking hand.

Mrs. Craven had braced herself against the wall while waiting. Martin offered the support of her arm, and assisted the tottering steps as far as the gate that opened from the grounds of Avonmore upon the high road leading to the nearest village.

As she returned to the house, passing round to the side entrance by which Rose and her companions had been admitted, Dr. Monteith was giving orders to the hackman who had brought them, to follow Mrs. Craven, just keeping within sight of her, and holding himself in readiness to give her any needed assistance.

Martin looked up into his face. It struck her as noble and kindly in features and expression, and she paused, half resolved to ask of him an explanation of all these sudden and surprising occurrences; but, on second thought, she refrained, merely bowed respectfully, and, passing in at the open door, hurried up-stairs to the suite of apartments till now occupied by Mrs. Craven, where she busied herself in obeying the order to pack up her effects for removal.

“What’s it all about, I wonder?” muttered the maid, moving rapidly back and forth between closets and trunks. “Robbed of her lawful inheritance, eh? I’d like to know how they managed that; for it was never an easy task to out-wit her.”

The door opened, and the housekeeper entered, hastily closing it after her.

“Oh, excuse me, Mrs. Martin, I forgot to knock,” she said, as the latter looked round in surprise; “but it’s no wonder, considering how flustered I am with all that’s going on in this house. It’s changed owners; and Mrs. Craven will never darken its doors again. There, what do you think of that?”

“I thought so; but do tell me all about it—all you know, at least.”

The housekeeper replied by repeating Rose’s story; winding up with the added information that Dr. Monteith had already paid off and dismissed all the old servants, including herself, and that she should leave the premises within the hour.

“On foot?” asked Martin.

“No, not I. He’s behaving like a real gentleman; says he’ll send me and my trunks to the village along with you and Mrs. Craven’s luggage. So I’m off to do my packing.” And she left the room as hastily as she had entered.

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## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### RETROSPECTION.

ROSE and Violet had taken gleeful possession of the large, roomy kitchen, and a good dinner was in course of rapid preparation there, while Mr. Tibbet busied himself, in the library, with the rearrangement of the Delacourt papers; and the doctor, Ernest, and Nina wandered from room to room of the spacious mansion; the father finding a mournful pleasure in pointing out to his children each spot made sacred to him by the former presence of their mother—his idolized wife.

They lingered long in the room where she had breathed her last. There had been little or no change in the furniture or its disposal; and at the moment of their entrance, Dr. Monteith seemed well-nigh overpowered by the sudden rush of sad recollections called forth by its familiar aspect.

Nina was leaning on his arm. He led her to a sofa, and signed to Ernest to seat himself on his other side. Then taking a hand of each, he described to them in low, tremulous tones, the scenes and incidents of that eventful day when Nina’s eyes had first opened to the light, and her mother’s closed to it forever on earth.

The three mingled their sighs and tears together; and never before had they seemed so near and dear to each other.

“Dearest father, how my heart aches to think how desolate

you must have felt that day," whispered Nina, leaning her head upon his breast.

"I was indeed," he said, passing an arm about her waist; "for I had lost my heart's choicest treasure, and knew not that two darling children were still spared to me. Had I known it, the blow caused by your beloved mother's death, terrible as it was, and must have been under any circumstances, would not have fallen upon me with such crushing weight."

A solemn hush fell on the little group; the spirit of the sainted wife and mother seemed almost sensibly present with them; for some moments they neither moved nor spoke, and Nina almost held her breath listening for the silent foot-falls, waiting for the soft touch of her mother's hand or lip upon her brow. But presently her father rose and led them from the room.

The grounds of Avonmore were scarcely equal in extent to those of Wald, but the house was even larger, and showed a more lavish expenditure of means. It was a palace-like dwelling, and nothing had been spared that fine artistic taste, joined to abundant wealth, could do to render it luxurious and attractive. There was a gallery of fine old paintings, many of them gems of art of almost priceless worth; and fine statues and pictures, and costly ornaments, adorned nearly every room. The lawns, shrubbery, and gardens were laid out with exquisite taste, and the hot-houses and conservatories were filled with rare exotic fruits and flowers.

The young people were charmed with all they saw, and but for two things—the consciousness that to her beloved father sad memories clung about all these scenes, and the remembrance of the hate and malice in Mrs. Craven's eyes—Nina would have been in really wild spirits; as it was, she seemed full of innocent gayety and mirth, now and then tempered by a shade of sadness, the reflection of the passing expression of her dear parent's face. True, the thought of her rejected lover, on his way to distant shores, would occasionally intrude

to damp her joy ; but she soon banished it with the determination to believe that he would return ere long and again sue for her hand ; and if he did not—well, she would tear his image from her heart ; even *that* should not be impossible to a will so strong and determined as hers.

“ What a lovely, delightful place this is ! ” she cried, as, with her father and brother, she looked out from the drawing-room window upon the broad river, darkening with the shadows of the coming night, and the wooded hill-tops still warm with the light of the setting sun. “ Father, can’t we send for Aunt Lettice and Lily, and just spend the summer here, all of us together ? ”

“ Perhaps so,” he answered ; “ only I must return for a time on account of some of my patients. Indeed, I am not quite certain that I ought to leave them at all for more than the few days I expected to be absent when we left Wald.”

Ernest was beginning affectionately to urge his need of rest, when they were interrupted by the entrance of Adolphus with the startling announcement that Mrs. Craven was lying very ill at the village inn, was thought to be in a dying condition, and had sent a messenger with an earnest entreaty that Dr. Monteith would come to her with all speed.

Nina would have had her father refuse to obey the summons, seeing in it only a new effort of their relentless foe to wreak her vengeance upon him. Her imagination drew terrible pictures of highwaymen and deadly assassins lying in ambush by the road-side, ready to spring out upon him as he passed and rob him of his precious life.

But he assured her that her fears were groundless ; that he knew the messenger to be an honest, trustworthy man, and that he felt it his duty to go. Yet, to please her, he agreed to take Adolphus with him. “ Don’t sit up for me, as there is no telling when I shall return,” he added, as he bade them good-bye. “ And, Ernest, take care of your sister. Sleep in adjoining rooms, and let Rose, too, be close at hand.”

## CHAPTER XLIX.

## RETRIBUTION.

MRS. CRAVEN was on the down-hill of life, upwards of sixty years of age. She had fretted herself into bad health since the death of her son, refusing to go out for necessary air and exercise, and for the most part keeping the sweet light of heaven excluded from her apartments, and leading as gloomy and secluded an existence as that of a cloistered nun.

The terrible excitement of that day, followed by the unusual fatigue of a long walk, exposed to the direct rays of a burning summer's sun, had well-nigh completed the work of destruction, and on reaching the village inn she had found herself so ill as to be forced to take to her bed ; and that with the feeling that she was never to rise from it again.

She had talked of weariness of life, of longing to lay down its burdens and rest in the grave ; but now that death was really staring her in the face, her sins rose up before her, and she grew wild with terror and despair.

She knew that Dr. Monteith was reckoned a skilful physician, and there was no other within many miles in whom she had any confidence. Therefore, and because she thought his forgiveness for her crimes against him and his would alleviate in some measure the sharp stings of an awakened conscience, she had begged that he might be sent for without delay.

The glow of the sunset had quite faded from the western sky, the hills loomed up darkly on every side, and the stars were coming out one by one, as the doctor and his companions, Adolphus and the messenger from the inn, set out on a rapid walk from Avonmore to the village.

The landlord met them at the tavern-door, evidently full



of curiosity. "Ah, doctor, how d' ye do? Glad to see you; have n't had the pleasure o' seein' you in these parts for a long while. Mrs. Craven's very bad, poor woman. Can't think what brought her here; but she's very bad, and in a terrible way because there's no priest at hand."

"Is there not one residing in the village?" asked the doctor.

"Yes; but he's absent at present; and the only other one within twenty miles is down sick."

"Where shall I find Mrs. Craven?"

"This way, sir, if you please." And he hurried forward, mounting the stairs to the first floor, and conducted the physician to a rather small room, plainly but very comfortably furnished, and beautifully neat and clean.

A shaded lamp burned on a stand in one corner, and beside it, in an arm-chair, sat Martin, looking grave and solemn; while her mistress lay tossing and moaning on the bed, her fierce black eyes looking larger, blacker, and fiercer than ever, in contrast to the pale, sunken, hollow cheeks.

"I thought you would never come!" she cried, starting up with a wild look, as Dr. Monteith entered. "You and the man that was sent to bring you must have crept along like snails. I wonder you were not in greater haste to hear what further confessions death could wring from Delilah Craven. Ha! ha! he's come, and I'm not so glad of it as I thought I should be. Ernest Monteith," and she clutched his arm with a death-like grip, as he drew near and laid his finger on her pulse, "Ernest Monteith, they say you have such skill as could all but raise the dead. Keep me alive till morning—till I can get a priest here to absolve me from my sins, and administer the last rites of the church."

Her hand loosened its hold, and she fell back gasping for breath.

"Mrs. Craven," he said, leaning over her, and speaking in low tones of intense earnestness, "look to that Priest who

is ever near, ever ready to listen to the cry of the returning penitent, and who is able to save to the uttermost."

"Don't waste time in talk!" she cried, again starting up, but only to fall back again, with a bitter groan. "I'm dying, don't you see it? Give me something to keep life in me till I can have the last rites of my church, and die in peace."

"It is not in my power," he said. "You have spoken truly; death is here, and no mortal hand may stay his uplifted dart."

"Ah, you will not try!" she shrieked. "Where now is your boasted religion, that teaches you to return good for evil? I have but robbed you for a few years of wealth which was more mine than yours, and of the company of wife and children; and for this you would rob me of my soul! Curse you! curse you! and may you die in agony ten times greater than mine!"

"You misjudge me," he said, with much emotion. "God knows I would grant your request if it were possible; that I would make any effort to save you, especially to secure your soul's salvation. But I know that you have not an hour to live; and that Jesus Christ alone is able to save you from eternal death; and I entreat you to flee at once to Him."

"There is no salvation out of the true church," she muttered. "And why, after all, should I so dread death? have I not done much to purchase heaven? Look here!" And tearing open the bosom of her night-dress, she showed him that she wore underneath it a garment of coarse haircloth, which must have kept up a constant irritation of the skin. Then, opening it in turn, she displayed beneath it a cross with sharp edges, that had cut and worn into the flesh, making a frightful sore.

"And that is not all," she said, with a ghastly smile, as he turned away with a look of pained, sorrowful disgust. "Since my son died, I have fasted two days out of every week; fasted from everything but bread and water, partaking but sparingly of them; and never, never have I been guilty

of allowing the smallest morsel of meat to pass my lips on Friday; and I have, for very many years, rigidly observed every fast and feast of the church. Ah, if I could but live to receive her last rites, all could not fail to be well. Ernest Monteith, you must, you *shall* keep me from dying till this can be accomplished!"

As she spoke, she glared at him with her fierce, malignant eyes, over which the film of death was already gathering, and with her dying fingers again clutched madly at his arm.

"Oh, that I could prolong your life, if but for a single hour, that you might have some short space for repentance!" he groaned, deeply moved. "Oh, ask help of Him who alone can give it! Cease trusting in the filthy rags of your own righteousness, and plead to be washed from your sins in his atoning blood!"

"Ah, you will not save me? Your hatred pursues me to the grave. Curse you! curse you!" she muttered.

Her fingers fell from his arm; a look of wild terror and despair passed over her face; she gasped once—twice—and was gone.

Martin fell down upon her knees, hiding her face and shuddering from head to foot, while Dr. Monteith turned away with a heavy sigh, and such a feeling of sickening horror as he had never known before, though he had stood by hundreds of death-beds. And yet he did not fear, indeed scarcely thought of, the curses she had heaped upon his head.

The following day the Monteiths left Avonmore for Wald, but returned a week later, bringing Aunt Lettice and Lily with them. The ladies remained during the summer and early autumn months, the two physicians coming and going, as business or pleasure dictated.

There was no lack of the best society; old friends and new hastened to welcome them to the neighborhood, and to

offer congratulations on the recovery of the property of which they had been so long unjustly deprived.

Nor were admirers wanting to the heiress of Avonmore and her friend. Lily was circumspect, and gave Ernest no cause of complaint; but had Marchant been there, his jealousy need not have died out for want of fuel to feed its flame. Yet Nina, smiling graciously upon all alike, really tried to give undue encouragement to none.

The last of October found them all together again at Wald, occupied with the old duties and the old pleasures. They mingled more in general society than formerly—Nina and Lily having quite arrived at the dignity of young ladyhood; but their pleasures were principally of the quiet kind.

The girls were almost inseparable during the day, — the greater part of which was usually spent with Aunt Lettice, — while the gentlemen were busied with the duties of their profession. But in the evening, when no company was present, the lovers were apt to be completely absorbed in each other — as lovers will — and Aunt Lettice to drop asleep in her chair. Then Nina devoted herself to her father, who was never weary of her society. Her sweetest songs, her finest performances on the piano and harp were for him, and she valued praise from no other source so highly. They enjoyed many a book together; he reading aloud to her while she worked, or, if very weary, leaning back in his cushioned chair while she read to him.

Nina seemed very happy, and indeed she was; except now and then when she could not banish the thought of Marchant, and the growing fear that all was over between them. She tried to forget him, and to believe that she had never loved him. And it was seldom she indulged her hungry heart with so much as a glance at the long, closely written letters received from him by her father and Ernest.

Yet not unfrequently they were read aloud in the family circle, and she dared not run away, for fear of exciting remark and suspicion of the true state of affairs between her

and the writer. She was obliged to sit still and listen, while they, with their lively detail of incidents of travel and graphic descriptions of scenery and people,—sometimes beautiful and charming ladies, his own country-women, or natives of the lands he was visiting,—perhaps did more than his presence might have done, to keep bright his image in her heart and make it to grow dearer than before.

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## CHAPTER L.

### SOWING AND REAPING.

IT was the middle of July,—the very height of the bathing-season,—and several successive days of unusually hot weather, even for that time of the year, had filled the hotels and boarding-houses of Cape May to overflowing.

In the great dining-hall of the "Columbia House" a hop was in full progress, and most of the guests were gathered there, either as participants or spectators of the gay and lively scene. Yet there were some—and they not a few—who thought the strains of music discoursed by the band pleasantly mellowed by the distance that lay between the house and the plank-walk, which for several squares ran parallel with the beach, and a moonlight promenade in the fresh sea-breeze, in full sight of the rolling, dashing waves, greatly to be preferred to the hot, close atmosphere of the ballroom.

Among these last was a gentleman with a lady upon each arm, both young and lovely, but the beauty of the one in singular and striking contrast to that of the other; the one small, slight, delicate, and fragile in appearance, with golden hair, violet eyes, and a complexion of pearly whiteness, with just the faintest tinge of rose-color in each softly rounded cheek; the other rather above the medium height, with a

form of exquisite proportion; abundance of raven hair; starry, glorious eyes, black as midnight—eyes that could flash with anger, melt in tenderness, or sparkle with fun; a face oval in form and perfect in outline, a Greek profile, a rich, creamy complexion, soft and beautiful as that of an infant, and cheeks blooming as the rose—a face and form that, once seen, could never be forgotten.

“How delicious this is!” she exclaimed, drawing a long, deep breath, “this breeze, and the sea, the glorious sea, with the moonlight dancing on the waves! I feel so gay to-night, so full of life and spirits, that I half wish I were a child again, that I might run, hop, skip, and jump, without fear of horrifying any chance beholder.”

“If you were a child, you would probably be in bed at this hour,” remarked the other lady, with a slight laugh; “it cannot be far from nine, I think.”

“Are you growing weary, Lily? Are we fatiguing you too much?” asked the gentleman, bending a tender, anxious look upon her sweet, fair face.

“Oh, no; I am not at all fatigued,” she answered, smiling brightly up at him. “I am growing so strong and well. I seem to inhale new life with every breath of this delightful bracing air.”

“Yes, you have improved wonderfully in the week that we have been here; but we must not try your new-found strength too far. Here are some seats; let us rest upon them a little while. We must have been walking for at least half an hour.”

They sat down, the taller lady dropping the gentleman’s arm, and drawing a little apart from him and the one he had called Lily. The two were evidently lovers, and seemed almost wholly engrossed with each other. She looked at them for a moment, a sweet and beautiful smile playing about her lips, then rose and paced slowly back and forth.

Presently a gentleman came up, bowed, and entered into conversation; then another, and another, till quite a little

group of admirers had gathered about her. Her wondrous beauty, her wit and vivacity, and the charming *naïveté* and sweetness of her manners, made her list of such a long one wherever she went; while doubtless her reputed wealth was not calculated to reduce their number.

"I have been looking for you in the ballroom, Miss Monteith," said one. "I had hoped to have the pleasure of dancing at least one set with you."

"I do not dance," she answered; "and greatly prefer this cool breeze and charming moonlight to the close air of the ballroom and the heat and glare of its artificial light."

"Certainly; they are more agreeable and healthful; but do you really mean to say that you never dance?"

"Never; I do not even know how."

"It is an accomplishment very easily acquired by an intelligent person, whose movements are naturally graceful," he said, with a meaning bow and smile; "and I am sure Miss Monteith would not find it in the least difficult."

"I have no desire to try," she answered, a little disdainfully.

"You would find it a delightful pastime, I do assure you."

"Possibly; yet I repeat that I have no wish to try it."

"Conscientious scruples, eh?"

"None, except as my father's wishes are concerned; but they are law to me."

"You are rather unfashionable in your sentiments and conduct in regard to this matter," remarked another of the gentlemen; "there are few young ladies of the present day—none that I am acquainted with—who are so ready to be guided by the opinions or wishes of their fathers."

"I believe that is true," she answered, "though I am sorry to have to acknowledge it. But perhaps the fault is not entirely with the daughters. I think there are few fathers like mine. My *own dear father*," she murmured, half under her breath; and the look of tender, loving reverence that came over her face was beautiful to see. But it vanished on the

instant ; she started, flushed crimson, and, covering her momentary confusion by a light, jesting remark about the bathing that day and the sport they had had in the water, turned her face seaward.

What was it that had set her heart to beating so wildly that she almost feared her companions would hear it above the strains of music and the dashing of the waves? A gentleman had passed with a lady on his arm. For one instant Nina had seen his face, had heard the tones of his voice ; a face and voice that she could not mistake, though she had not heard the one or seen the other for more than a year, and the moment before had believed the owner far beyond those rolling billows, wandering on a foreign shore.

She ventured presently to send a stealthy glance after the pair, while still keeping up her lively chat with those around her. They were already nearly out of sight ; she could barely discern the outlines of their forms in the distance ; but it seemed to her that the lady's was slight and graceful, and that he was bending over her in lover-like fashion.

Why did the sight send such a quick, sharp pang to her heart? Could it be that she still cared so much for Marchant de Vere? she who was surrounded by troops of admirers wherever she went? No : she did not, would not care for him ; and she would let him see that she did not ; for had he not allowed a whole year to pass without another effort to win her hand? True, she had rejected him most scornfully ; but love that was so easily vanquished was not worth the having.

Yet, while still carrying on a spirited conversation with those about her, she continually caught herself intently listening for the sound of his returning footsteps, and now and then glancing in the direction in which he had gone. Nor had she long to wait — though to her impatience the minutes seemed like hours — ere the two came sauntering back.

How her heart beat again ; how carefully she kept her face turned toward the sea, away from the path he was following ; how her ear was strained to catch the sound of his voice or foot.



“Ernest, my dear fellow! and Lily, too! excuse me—Miss Donaldson,” she heard him exclaim in joyous tones. “I did not know that you were here. How delightful to meet you!”

Then there was Ernest’s hearty “Why, Marchant, old fellow, is it you? where did you come from? This is the greatest and most delightful surprise!” And Lily’s “Marchant de Vere! we all thought you were still in Europe.”

Then introductions were exchanged, followed by the question, “And how are my uncle and Aunt Lettice? and — and your sister? All well, I hope?”

“All quite well, I thank you, and will be delighted to hear of your return. You must go home with us, of course. But Nina is here to speak for herself. Nina!”

She paid no heed to the call, but went on with her lively chat.

“Where is she? is that she?”

Marchant’s voice was eager in its tones. He had seated his companion, Miss Carrington, by Lily’s side, and with quick, impulsive step he hastened in the direction of the little group of which Nina was the centre.

Her face was toward him now. She looked up: their eyes met.

“Ni — Miss Monteith!” His hand was extended eagerly, and his eyes looked beseechingly into hers.

She gave him the tips of her gloved fingers, and with a stiff, formal “How do you do, Mr. de Vere?” drew coldly back.

His eyes flashed; he bowed a haughty “Good-evening,” and turned away without another word.

Nina had never been more angry with herself; and a fierce jealousy toward Miss Carrington, who, she could see even from that distance, was a very sweet-looking girl, suddenly sprung up in her heart. She was bitterly angry with her, with Marchant, with herself, and with all the world. Yet was there no outward sign of the tempest raging within. The tones

of her voice, and her low, musical laugh were as gay and glad-some as before ; her face as bright and sweet. She talked on, exchanging light, jesting remarks and merry repartee with those about her till Ernest came to ask if she wished to go in, saying Lily was weary and would like to retire, but did not mind going alone, if she preferred to remain longer on the beach.

“I am quite ready to go,” Nina answered, cheerfully, and taking her brother’s offered arm, she bade her admirers a gay good-night.

The two girls shared the same room, and Ernest parted with them at the door.

“What a delightful surprise this is — Marchant’s coming,” remarked Lily, beginning her preparations for bed. “And that Miss Carrington is very sweet-looking. We shall now be quite a pleasant party by ourselves.”

“I hate sweet people,” cried Nina, passionately ; “I never could bear them ! — those people that look as if butter would n’t melt in their mouths, and are ready with such a martyr-like air whenever they can’t have everything their own way.”

“Ah, yes, I know what you mean ; but I don’t think Miss Carrington is of that sort. She looks like the genuine article ; and is right pretty, too.”

“Pretty, indeed !” muttered Nina, half angrily, and with averted face.

“But, my dear child,” said Lily, “you were not near enough to judge ; and both Ernest and I thought her remarkably pretty, as well as lady-like and agreeable. But what in the world did you do to Marchant ? He seemed so bright and cordial when he first encountered us — really gay and happy ; but when he came back from speaking to you, he was quite the reverse ; looked moody and depressed, and, I thought, found it hard work to talk.”

“Hard work to talk, with that sweet, pretty creature by his side ! Is it possible ?”

So bitter and scornful was Nina's tone that the sweet violet eyes of her friend opened wide with surprise.

"Lily, dear, I beg your pardon," cried Nina, suddenly throwing her arms around her, and kissing her affectionately, but with glistening eyes. "I am hatefully cross to-night. I don't know what has come over me. No danger of any one ever disliking me for my sweetness."

"Ah, I understand," thought Lily, returning the caress as warmly as it was given; "how blind I have been. The course of true love never did run smooth, except in Ernest's case and mine." Then she said, aloud, "No, you have none of that insipid sweetness which, as it seems to me, is the outgrowth and evidence of hypocrisy in some, in others, of an indolent self-complacency; faults to which I fear I am far more inclined, by natural temperament, than you, and which are far more detestable than the quick temper that seems to belong to an energetic, impulsive nature like yours."

"Oh, Lily, don't excuse me or make light of my faults. I would give anything for your sweet patience and serenity, that takes everything so calmly and smoothly."

"Ah, I am so happy, so very happy," whispered Lily, half hiding her sweet, blushing face on Nina's bosom, "that I deserve no credit for the qualities you mention. And you, I see, are not happy to-night," she added, looking wistfully up into the beautiful face bending over her; "and why should you not be? Think how you are admired and loved; how inexpressibly dear you are to us all,—your father, Aunt Lettice, Ernest, and me."

A silent caress was the only reply, and Nina, moving away, stood at the window gazing out upon the sea.

"Are you not coming to bed?" Lily asked, at length, as she laid herself down in it. "It is after eleven, and so you will get very little beauty sleep, even if you come now. However, you can afford to spare that, if any one can," she added, with a light laugh.

"No; I have n't the least inclination to sleep. I am certain

it would be useless to try, and I cannot take my eyes from the sea ; I never weary of looking at it. So I shall throw on my dressing-gown, and sit out here on the balcony for a little while ; then my wakefulness will not disturb you ; and as I shall leave the door open and remain close by it, I can hear if you call."

Lily was already half asleep, and merely murmured an inarticulate reply, as Nina passed out and sat down with her elbow on the railing and her cheek resting on her hand.

The hop was still going on, but in a distant part of the building, and the music of the band, as it came softly to her ear, mingled pleasantly with the gentle murmur of the sea.

It soothed her almost insensibly, and calmer feelings gradually replaced the fierce anger and jealousy that had agitated her breast for the last hour. The more she thought of it, the more fully convinced she felt that this Miss Carrington was Marchant's *fiancée*, and that he was lost to her forever ; but she submitted with a sad resignation, comforting herself with the thought of her father's love, and how she would cling to him, and find her happiness in it as long as they both should live. And now she was glad that she had treated Marchant with such marked coldness that night,—though she had at first been so angry with herself for it,—for she would not, for worlds, 'have him suspect—now that he loved and was to marry another—that she cared in the least for him, or that there was the slightest possibility that he might have won her hand.

She did not know how long she had sat there,—it might have been an hour, or it might have been more,—when suddenly the music ceased, and the noise of the dancers' feet, and a confused murmur of voices was heard instead ; then a quick, agitated step on the stairs, and hurrying through the hall,—a step so different from what Ernest's ordinarily was, that she did not recognize it as his, until he stood pale and trembling at her side.

She sprang up with a low cry : " What is it ? Oh, what is it ? What has happened ? "

He caught her to his breast with a convulsive clasp, dropped his head on her shoulder, and, strong, brave man as he was, sobbed aloud.

“Oh, brother, brother, speak!” she cried. “My father?”

“No, darling, no; not that! thank God! it is not that,” he answered, hurriedly, lifting his head and dashing away his tears, “but Marchant, our own dear Marchant, is — is drowned!”

He was not prepared for the look of wild anguish that came over the face uplifted to his, or the low heart-broken cry that burst from her pale lips, as her head dropped lifeless upon his arm.

“Oh, Ernest, what is it?” asked Lily’s voice, at his side, for, roused by Nina’s first cry of alarm, she had sprung out of bed, and, hastily donning dressing-gown and slippers, had rushed out to learn the cause.

“Oh, I have killed her, my precious sister! But how could I know? How could I guess? I never suspected it in the least!” groaned Ernest, lifting her in his arms and bearing her into the room, where he laid her gently on a couch before the open window.

Lily sprang to the washstand, filled a tumbler with water, and brought it to him.

“Oh, Ernest, is it anything more than a swoon?” she asked, fearfully.

“No; and it will not last long, I hope,” he whispered, as he sprinkled the water upon the pale, unconscious face. “Oh, my sister, how could I be so thoughtless?”

“But what is it?” asked Lily, trembling and weeping. “Oh, Ernest, it is not bad news from home?”

“No; but Marchant,—dear, brave fellow!” His voice was scarcely audible, as he went on. “A man — some stranger — had imprudently gone in to bathe, got beyond his depth, or, perhaps, was seized with cramp, and cried out for help. Marchant was pacing the beach, no one very near him, when, hearing the cry, he hastily pulled off his coat and vest, threw them on the ground, and rushed in to the rescue.

He never came out. He was an excellent swimmer; but I suppose the drowning man caught hold of him and dragged him under."

"Oh, Ernest! and did no one try to save him?" Lily's voice was choked with sobs.

"Yes; those that saw him rush in, ran for the life-boat; but it took some little time to launch it, and then the darkness you know—and—well, they had been out an hour or more, beating about in every direction, but without finding the least trace of either."

All the time he was speaking, he was using every effort to revive his sister; but for a long while all was in vain, so long that he began to be very seriously alarmed. At last she heaved a deep sigh, opened her eyes, and looked up into his face with a bewildered expression.

"Where am I? and what is the matter?" she asked, faintly. Then, starting up, "Ernest! Ernest! why do you linger here? why are you not with him?" she cried, vehemently. "Who can say that there is not a little spark of life still left? I've read of people being resuscitated after hours of what seemed fruitless effort. Oh, why have you left him? You, his dearest friend, and a physician, too! Oh, go, go! If you have any love for me, my brother, leave me, and go, go to him!" And she wrung her hands, looking at him with such a beseeching, tearless agony in her beautiful face as almost broke his heart.

"Dearest," he said, scarcely able to command his voice, "they have not found—"

He could go no further. He had thrown his arm around her, and her head sank upon his breast, while she clung to him with a death-like grasp, and shudder after shudder shook her whole frame. But for many minutes not a sound escaped her lips. Then at last, "Ernest, Ernest," she moaned, almost under her breath, "is it—is it my work? did I—did I murder him?"

"You, Nina?" he asked, with a start of extreme surprise.

“Oh, darling! how could that be? No, no; he perished in a noble effort to save another.”

“Thank God for that!” she whispered; “but — but Ernest, my brother, my heart is broken. He loved me once — oh, how he loved me! but I — I spurned him; and now, — oh, Ernest, if I could only die!”

“No, darling, don’t, oh don’t say that! Think of our father, and all you are to him; his very life is bound up in you. For his sake, dear sister, you must conquer this grief and live.”

“Oh, take me home to him!” she moaned; “take me home! take me home!”

“Yes, Ernest,” whispered Lily, who was weeping bitterly by his side, “let us go at once: let us leave by the morning boat.”

“But you,” he said, his first thought ever for her, “you are improving so fast in this bracing air, and ought to stay longer.”

“I will come back if you wish; but do let me go with her now.”

He considered a moment. “Ought we not to write first, and break the news to them gently? Think what he was to them both; what he has been for years.”

“I will wait,” sighed Nina. “It may be that father will come to-day. But, oh, never ask me to look again at that dreadful, dreadful sea!”

Ernest pressed her closer to him with a silent caress. “God help you to bear this sorrow, my poor sister!” he whispered.

There was silence in the room for a moment; the whole house had grown still, and no sound reached them but the dull, monotonous washing of the waves upon the shore.

Nina shuddered as it struck upon her ear; then raising herself wearily, “I have been very selfish,” she said, in a dreary tone; “I am keeping you both up, and it must be very late. Do go to bed, and try to get some sleep.”

“If you will do the same,” said Ernest, tenderly. “Lily, you ought to be there. I fear you will lose all you have gained.” And bidding them a kind good-night, and receiving a promise that they would retire at once to rest, he went away.

As the door closed upon him, Lily threw her arms around Nina, and for a minute or two they remained locked in a close embrace. Then they crept silently into bed.

The soft, regular breathing of the one soon told that she slept; but the other never lost consciousness for a moment. How the noise of the waves tortured her! A few hours before, the sound had been very pleasant and soothing to her ear; but now were they not rejoicing over their fiendish work? exulting over the destruction of their helpless victim, and greedily clamoring for more? And thought and memory were no less torturing. What would she not have given to recall the past! at least so far as her conduct toward the dead was concerned. Oh, had she but treated him kindly that night, the stings of remorse would not be so very terrible, so almost unendurable.

Morning found her with one of her worst attacks of nervous headache, to which all Ernest's skill utterly failed to bring the slightest relief. But it gave her a sufficient excuse for keeping her room; and as she and Marchant had scarcely been seen together, no one but Ernest and Lily had the slightest suspicion of any connection between her sudden illness and the sad accident of the night, which was the principal theme of conversation that day with a large majority of the bathers and promenaders.

Ernest and Lily would have remained all day by her bedside, but she begged with almost feverish vehemence to be left to solitude, and they could but yield to her request. They went out together, and she was left alone.

Wrapped in a loose dressing-gown, she lay on her couch, with the curtains drawn before the windows trying to shut out light and sound—yesterday so pleasant, to-day so torturing.



The house had grown comparatively still, for it was the bathing-hour, and the chambers and halls were well-nigh deserted, when she thought she heard a familiar step approaching her door. It opened softly; she turned her eyes toward it, and with a low, half-smothered cry of mingled joy and anguish, started up, and found herself folded in her father's arms, pressed to her father's beating heart.

He held her in a long, close, silent embrace, while her arms were clinging about his neck, and her face lay hidden on his breast.

"My darling, my poor darling!" he murmured, at length, passing his fingers caressingly through her hair; and then at last tears came to the relief of the almost bursting heart—came like a long pent-up flood that suddenly bursts its barriers, and with overwhelming force sweeps all before it.

He let her weep, only soothing her with silent, tender caresses, till the fountain was exhausted, and she lay like a wearied child in his arms. Then he laid her on her couch again, and sat down beside her, with one cool hand on her throbbing temples, the other clasping one of hers. He asked no questions, either then or afterward, for Ernest had met him on his arrival and told him all.

The news of Marchant's death was a terrible shock to him; but most of all his heart ached for his beloved daughter; though his surprise on learning how she had cared for the lost one was scarcely less than her brother's had been.

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed. "I knew that he loved her, but thought she was indifferent to him; for, otherwise, why should she have rejected his suit, as she tacitly acknowledged to me that she did?"

"That I cannot answer," replied Ernest, with a sad shake of the head; "but it is impossible now to doubt that she truly loved him."

Nina was very grateful to her father for this silence. The suddenness of the shock, joined to her natural impetuosity and frankness, had revealed her secret to Ernest and Lily;

but in the hours of pain and solitude that followed, her woman's pride helped her to regain the command over herself, which had been taught her by those hard years with Mrs. Powell — when, having none to sympathize in her joys or sorrows, she had learned to hide them all in her own bosom. Thinking of Miss Carrington as probably Marchant's affianced bride, she said to herself that none must ever guess what he had been to her; that the world must suppose that she mourned him only as the friend who had been almost as a son to her father, a brother to Ernest and herself.

And schooling her heart thus, she left her room the next day and returned home with her father, a little paler, very quiet and subdued in manner, but otherwise appearing much as usual, save an expression of deep, unutterable sadness that, in unguarded moments, would rest upon her features or look out from the depths of her beautiful eyes.

Though Marchant had been so long absent from Wald, the house had suddenly grown strangely empty and desolate without him; his presence seemed sorely wanting in every room. In silent anguish Nina wandered here and there, looking for him, listening for the sound of his step, his voice, his gay, ringing laughter. Alas! she should hear them never more — never, no, never. Oh, the bitterness of that thought!

One room still bore his name — Marchant's room every one called it. Thither Nina bent her steps on the day succeeding that of her return. She thought to find solitude; but Mrs. Barron was there before her, looking over the contents of his trunks, which Dr. Monteith had secured and caused to be sent home. Nina would have retreated, but the old lady, turning her head at the sound of the opening of the door, showing a face all wet with tears, beckoned her to come forward.

“It breaks my heart — the dear boy — not one of us forgotten,” she sobbed, pointing to a heap of packages that she had laid together on the carpet. “I know how he looked forward to giving them to us — so generous and affectionate as he always was.”

Nina made no response: she could not speak; her face grew white and rigid as marble, and her hands were clinched till the nails buried themselves in the soft, rosy palm. She leaned against the mantel, looking on in tearless agony, while her old friend proceeded with her task, still talking in low, heart-broken accents.

“Dear, dear fellow! I can’t realize that he won’t be coming in and saying, as he used, whenever he found me going over his things and putting them to rights, ‘Thank you, Aunt Lettice; you are a second mother to me!’ Oh, to think I’ll never hear it again — never, never!”

Every word pierced Nina’s heart afresh. She would have fled from the room, but her feet seemed rooted to the spot. She neither moved nor spoke; no sound came from her lips, nor sigh heaved her bosom, nor tear gathered in the burning eyes that gazed with such wistful anguish upon each article that had so lately known the touch of his hand,—the clothes he had worn, the books he had read, the pretty and curious things he had collected and brought home as gifts to friends, or mementos of his travels.

Among them lay a small volume bound in morocco, with his name on it in gilt letters — a diary. It had been her New-Year’s gift to him the first year of their acquaintance; given with a laughing request that it should be returned when full. To which he had rejoined, “Not while I live; but if found among my effects when I’m gone, you may claim it.”

She had entirely forgotten the incident; but as her eye fell upon the book, the whole scene flashed upon her. Her heart gave a bound; she stooped, caught up the volume and thrust it into her pocket, feeling almost guilty in thus privately possessing herself of it (Mrs. Barron’s back being turned at the moment), yet that it was hers of right, and that she could neither resign it to another nor allow any mortal creature to share the secret of its existence. She stole noiselessly from the room, and having gained her own, and secured herself against intrusion, drew the book from her

pocket. It opened of itself where last his pen had been at work, and, glancing down its page, she read what was written there.

LIVERPOOL, June 30, 18—.

To-morrow I sail for my native land. I have a gift for each of the dear ones at Wald. A ring for my darling, (I cannot help calling her that in my own secret heart, and these pages that no eye shall ever look upon but mine. But, alas! will she ever give me the right to do so? ever forgive those cruel, cruel words?) It is both beautiful and costly, yet seems but a poor offering to lay at your feet, my peerless one! Oh, will you accept it? Will you permit me to place it upon your finger as the sign and seal of our betrothal? Alas! much I fear you will spurn both it and the giver! and if so—life will be of little worth to me, your rejected lover.

PHILADELPHIA, July 16, 18—.

At home once more. Again I breathe the same air with her. How my heart throbs at the thought! I long to fly to her this instant; yet shrink from the meeting, lest all my fond hopes be dashed to the ground. Oh, Nina, Nina, how impossible that I should ever resign you to another, or endure life without the hope of winning you! I cannot see her to-day, for I hear she is absent from Wald; and that one whom I must see at once on urgent business, is now at Cape May.

\* \*

The 16th of July! The very day of his death; the day on which she had returned his eager, cordial greeting with such marked coldness. How had she wounded that noble, loving heart! The book fell from her hand, and, with a low cry of bitter anguish, she threw herself down upon the couch where she had been sitting, and buried her face in its pillows. Oh, had she but treated him kindly even then, all would have been well! He would have told his love, and won from her the acknowledgment that it was returned. He would then have stayed by her side, and, unconscious of the peril of that imprudent bather, would not have risked and lost his precious life in the vain attempt to save another. Oh, the pain, the agony of that

thought ! And yet there mingled with it a thrill of joy. No other had supplanted her in his affection ; his love had been hers, hers only to the very last, and none had a nearer right than she to mourn his loss.

And she had loved Marchant with all the strength of her strong nature,— with a love that she could never give to any other. She was well-nigh crushed beneath her load of grief and remorse : yet she must conceal her wound ; and she did, so effectually that none but her father ever suspected how deep and sore it was. It was only when entirely alone that she allowed her bursting heart to give full vent to all its pent-up anguish ; though sometimes, when no one else was by, she would creep to her father's side, and resting her head on his shoulder or hiding her pale face on his breast, while his arm was folded lovingly about her, would shed silent tears, — tears that she would have permitted no other mortal eyes to see. His sympathy was very sweet and soothing to the sore and aching heart.

Dr. Monteith was alone in his office, having just dismissed the last of a dozen or more of poor patients.

“For you, sah,” said Adolphus, entering, and laying a letter on the table before his master.

The boy withdrew. The doctor took up the missive, looked at the address, and a sudden paleness overspread his countenance ; he seemed strangely agitated as he broke the seal and glanced hurriedly over the contents. Then he dropped it, to lift hands and eyes to heaven in a fervent thanksgiving.

It told a strange tale of extreme peril and wonderful escape ; for the writer was none other than Marchant de Vere, — not, as they had believed, lying cold and dead at the bottom of the ocean, but still alive and well.

Instead of sinking beneath the waves, he had come in contact with a floating log, which buoyed him up for hours, while he was carried farther and farther out to sea. At length he

was seen, and picked up in an unconscious and almost dying state, by the crew of an outward-bound vessel. He received every kindness at their hands ; but several days passed ere he was able to give any account of himself, or to notice where he was or who were about him. When he could do so, he learned that they were on the coast of South America, and that the vessel was bound for Rio Janeiro. His letter was dated from that city, where he had been so fortunate as to fall in at once with an old acquaintance, who kindly lent him all the money he required.

Having thus reported himself, Marchant went on to tell of his love for Nina, her rejection of his suit, her continued coldness, and his despairing resolve to see her no more till time had healed his wounds, and enabled him to overcome his passion. He would not return for years, he said ; should travel about in different parts of South America, and, probably, eventually settle down in one or another of its cities.

Dr. Monteith picked up the letter again and gave it a second and more careful perusal. "Foolish children," he murmured, with a smile ; "I see I shall have to interfere to set them right with each other." And forthwith he wrote a letter that, when received, made Marchant's heart leap for joy.

Of course the doctor could not have the heart to keep the good news of the rescue to himself. It was soon made known, and caused great rejoicing in the household, though tempered with regret for the intended long absence of their hero. Nina alone said nothing of that ; but she speedily recovered much of her old bloom and brightness, though her father carefully refrained from giving her the smallest hint of what he had done until the time drew near when Marchant might be expected.

\* \* \* \* The warm, ruddy glow of the sunset was just fading out of the sky at the close of a lovely September day, as a young, handsome man alighted from a street-car, and hurried with rapid step in the direction of Wald. He paused at the gate, and with his hand upon it, looked eagerly across

the lawn and up and down the broad green alleys. He started, and his pulses quickened as he caught sight of a solitary female figure slowly pacing to and fro in one of the latter. He could not be mistaken; the queenly form and graceful movements could belong to none other than the peerless daughter of the house.

He pushed open the gate, entered, and, making a wide circuit among the trees, placed himself behind one within a few feet of her. She continued her walk, and presently passed so near that he could have touched her dress. He heard a gentle sigh. Was she thinking of him? Softly, tenderly, he uttered her name, "Nina."

How she started and flushed; what a glad light was in her eyes as she lifted her proud head and sent a searching glance from side to side. "Marchant," she cried, almost under her breath, but with what a tender tremulousness, what a timid, yet joyous eagerness in her tones.

A sudden rustle, the sound of a quick step on the gravel-walk, and Marchant stood before her. He said not a word, but his looks were more eloquent than speech. Their eyes met; he opened his arms, and—she never quite knew how it was, but the next moment they had enfolded her, and were straining her to his breast; silently at first, then with whispered words of such deep tenderness, such passionate love, as made her heart to thrill with exquisite happiness. Nothing but death, that severs all earthly ties, should ever part them more.

Years have passed since that glad hour, years of such unalloyed felicity, that Nina laughingly asserts that she and Marchant did all their quarrelling before marriage; whilst Ernest and Lily are evidently reserving theirs for the time when old age shall leave them nothing better to do.

"May we never live to see that day," ejaculates Ernest, with a loving glance at the sweet face of his little wife.

Dr. Monteith cannot bear to be separated from either of his children, and they form one harmonious household—now

at Wald, and now at Avonmore—of which he is the loved and revered head. Once he looked forward to a lonely and childless old age; but how changed the prospect now! his children delight to do him honor and make his comfort their chief care, while merry, rosy-cheeked little ones clamber about his knees, or, with joyous shouts of "Grandpa, grandpa, our dear grandpa!" run to welcome his home-coming.

Mrs. Barron is Aunt Lettice to them as to their parents, and finds it a difficult matter to refrain from spoiling them all with unlimited indulgence.

On coming of age, Nina, with her father's cordial approval, deeded the Oakdale property to Essie Powell. It was left in the care of the trustees who had been appointed by Mr. Clemmens, until Essie should reach her majority; the income from it, in the meanwhile, to be used in clothing and educating her.

But neither this act of kindness and liberality to her child, nor the generous forbearance exercised toward her husband and herself, could win for Nina a place in Mrs. Powell's regard. On the contrary, she was bitterly angry that the property had not been given into her own possession; and to this day she continues to speak of our heroine as "that depraved, ungrateful girl."

THE END.



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