ELLEN PERCY

OR

THE MEMOIRS OF AN ACTRESS

BY

GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS

New Edition Vol. IV.

MADRAS:

Published by the Coronation Book Depot,
Sowcarpet.

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BY

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PART THE FIRST

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD HOUSE AT LEEDS.

I HAVE often thought, when looking back through the vista of years to the period of my early infancy, that such retrospect was like plunging the regards into the almost endless recesses of a forest,—where, at the extremity of long winding avenues, feeble and uncertain glimpses of light are caught amidst the deep embowering shades. And in the same way that imagination itself grows bewildered when fitting into the depths of that vast wilderness of umbrageous verdure,—so does memory become confused when striving to fix its gaze on the earliest incidents of life that can by any possibility be within its reach. Of this dim and shadowy species was a recollection which would at times haunt me like the illdefined impression of a troubled dream. In my childhood I used to sit and wonder whether the circumstance could ever have possibly occurred—or whether it were a mere fancy arising from some unaccountable freak or aberration of an infantile mind. Methought, however, that this earliest impression of mine was associated with some dark gloomy place—a man fondling me upon his knee, then pressing me to his heart and sobbing bitterly—then a woman taking me from his arms, straining me to her own bosom, and sobbing and weeping with even more convulsive violence than the grief of the other. And after this scene there appeared to be a blank in my existence—until my next impressions were associated with my grandfather's house at Leeds.

In that great northern town, and in one of those low quarters which almost exclusively swarm with the poorest members of the manufacturing population—in the midst of a labyrinth of narrow filthy streets, interspersed with huge dingy factories—and beneath an atmosphere almost everlastingly blackened by the smoke vomited forth from the giant chimneys that overlooked the whole maze of habitations,—there was that house situated. It was one of the largest in the entire quarter of which I am speaking—and perhaps also the gloomiest. Its dark red-brick front displayed many small windows of the old-fashioned latticed description; and there was

a heavy pointed wooden portico, supported by two very meagre pillars. The house was large enough for the accommodation of a numerous family; and yet it only contained four persons. These were my grandfather, the housekeeper, myself and a wretched drab of a servant-of-all-work. I did not know *then*—but I have since learnt, and therefore I may as well at once inform the reader—that my grandfather, Mr. Forsyth, had never pursued any ostsensible profession: but he lent moneyand discounted bills—though always in small sums; for notwithstanding the extent of his avarice he was afraid of anything in the shape of a great risk, and therefore would never be too speculative. The house was his own property: he had bought it many years back, at a price which would have been cheap for even one of the humblest dwellings in the neighbourhood. At the time that he thus purchased it, the house had been long shut up: some dreadful murder had been committed within its walls—its repute was bad—superstition invested it with the darkest terrors—and it was falling into decay when Mr. Forsyth, availing himself of what he considered to be an excellent bargain, became its purchaser. If by living in the meanest lodging elsewhere, and letting that house to anyone else, my grandfather could have made money, he would have done it: but he knew that no family would dwell in that house—it would have moreover required a considerable outlay for reparation—and therefore Mr. Forsyth continued to inhabit it himself.

Two-thirds of the rooms were shut up; and only just as many were furnished as were required for the use of the inmates. And such furniture as it was! A few pounds expended at the meanest broker's would have purchased much better articles. A front parlour on the ground-floor served as the only sitting-room: behind it was a sort of office, where my grandfather kept his books and papers, and transacted his business with the borrowers who called upon him; and an inner door opening from this office, communicated with a room that jutted out into the yard and which served as Mr. Forsyth's bedchamber. The housekeeper occupied an upper room; and a smaller chamber opening therefrom, was alloted to my use. The servant-girl's chamber was higher up still.

From all that I have just said, the reader is prepared to learn that Mr. Forsyth was of the most penurious habits; and I thought at the time that he was exceedingly poor. Indeed, like all misers, he was constantly complaining poverty, and vowing that he should be ruined if anything which he fancied to border upon extravagance were practised. To myself he was much attached: but it was after his own peculiar fashion. He would caress and fondle me—and yet not merely grudge me a toy, but even the means of education. I used to go to a neighbouring day-school, frequented by the daughters of respectable tradesmen: but my grandfather was constantly grumbling at the payment of the pittance which my tuition thus cost him. Fortunate however was it for me that the dame who kept the school was a worthy good-hearted woman; and conceived a liking for me. She said that I was the most intelligent as well as the most docile of her pupils; and she took a delight in teaching me. I believe she had some little independence of her own, and therfore was not compelled to look too closely to the remuneration she received from the parents or relatives of the girls

attending her school. She frequently kept me after school-hours, and regaled me in her parlour—which, by its neatness and comfort had to me the air of a palace in comparison with the cheerless ill-furnished parlour at home. Perhaps she thought I was half-starved; for she took a delight in making me eat the good things which she placed before me. Although my grandfather would pay for no "extras," but merely wanted me to have what he called "a plain education," yet the worthy lady—(her name was Mrs. Kelly, and I am glad to have an opportunity of making honourable mention of it)—put me into the drawing-class and also into the music-class; and she allowed me to learn dancing. My grandfather was delighted: he would gladly have suffered me to acquire all possible accomplishments, so long as he was not called upon to pay for them. Everything that he himself or anyone belonging to him could get for nothing, was in his estimation an immense gain and a subject for the extremest self-solicitation. Thus altogether, under the tuition of that worthy and kind-hearted Mrs. Kelly, I received a very tolerable education, embellished with some few accomplishments.

I did not know what to think of Mrs. Parks, my grandfather's housekeeper. She was kind enough to me; but I could not help fancying that there was something forced, or rather artificial and hypocritical, in this display of tenderness, and that it was only shown in order to curry favour with Forsyth, because he himself loved me. I used to wonder how it was possible for such a sour-looking old woman as Mrs. Parks, to be sincerely good and kind towards anyone. Her countenance had a sinister expression—and never more so than when, in a sort of canting tone, she was lavishing praises upon me in the presence of my grandfather. Over him she evidently wielded an immense influence, though he himself did not choose to acknowledge it: on the contrary, whenever, with her wonted hypocritical air of deference, she proffered her advice on any point, he vowed he would do the very reverse—and yet her counsel was always followed! She had been with him for a great number of years: she used to sit with us in parlour, and was treated almost as an equal—though she invariably said "sir" when speaking to my grandfather, and used to call me "Miss Ellen." The influence she possessed over Mr. Forsyth had not been acquired by tyranny: nor was it ever asserted, in a dominating spirit. It was the influence that was obtained insidiously, in the thousand and one ways in which such a woman could render herself necessary to such a man. For when I was alone with my grandfather, he would frequently tell me how faithful a creature Mrs. Parks was—how economically she managed his little household—how kind she was to myself—and how irreparable would be her loss if anything should happen to her. And yet it would sometimes occur to me, notwithstanding these praises bestowed upon the housekeeper—and notwithstanding the vehement assertion of his own independence in opposition to any advice she might at times proffer, as I have already stated—that my grandfather experienced more or less fear of Mrs. Parks; and when this idea was in my mind, I fancied it was because he was afraid that she should leave him and procure some bitter situation.

She had for many long years been a widow; and she had a son who was clerk to a lawyer living at

York. Thomas Parks was an individual of by no means prepossessing appearance; he was about five-and-thiry years of age when I was ten or a eleven; he had red hair and whiskers, a face covered with freckles, and eyelashes that were almost white. He wore spectacles and had a demure look; indeed methought that his limp white neckcloth and his invariable suit of seedy black gave him that pseudo-sanctimonious aspect which characterises the hypocrite who would fain pass for a saint. There was something unpleasantly fawning and cringing in his manner, as well as whining and snivelling in his tone. He had a wife and a perfect swarm of children; for one day Mrs. Parks took me, as a very great treat, to York, when she was going on a brief holiday visit to her son: and on that occasion I formed the acquaintance of the entire family. Occasionally—once perhaps in every three months—Mr. Parks came over to Leeds to see his mother: it was invariably upon a Sunday—and my grandfather permitted him to dine at his table. This was the only guest I ever saw at the house, with the exceptions which I shall presently have to name: and it might be considered an extraordinary proof of Mr. Forsyth's regard for Mrs. Parks, or else of his desire to do an occasional thing to concilliate her, that he should thus even at distant intervals, permit another mouth to feed itself at his board. And while talking of the table, I may as well add that though there was always a sufficiency of food, and that Mrs. Kelly's apprehension of my being half-starved was by no mean's well-founded,—yet the utmost parsimony was observed in respect to the dishes themselves, and the viands were hashed up again and again until the uttermost morsel was disposed of.

I am now about to specify the exceptions to which I have just alluded. But I must previously explain that I had been told my parents had died when I was quite an infant; and when on two or three occasions I had mentioned to my grandfather the vague and shadowy impression I experienced of the scene alluded to in the opening sentences of my narrative, he assured me it was mere fancy, for that I had never been in a position to be so caressed, sobbed and wept over, within the range of my memory, inasmuch as I was only a few months old when my father and mothher were carried off by the same malignant disease. The reader has of course understood that Mr. Forsyth was my maternal grandfather—my own surname being Percy. I knew that I had an aunt—my father's only sister, and who was a widow. Mr. Wakefield, her deceased husband, had been a manufacturer in a small way at Sheffield, and by the closest application to business he ruined his health—so that he sank into the grave before he had lived long enough to overcome the difficulties attendant upon entering into business with a very limited capital. From the wrecks of his property a sufficiency was saved to purchase a small annuity for Mrs. Wakefield: but she, being a woman of thrifty habits and excellent disposition, contrived to maintain herself and her fatherless boy in modest respectability.

I was about ten years of age when one morning, amidst an infinity of grumblings on the part of my grandfather, I gleaned the intelligence that he had invited Mrs. Wakefield to pass a week with him. I was overjoyed at the idea of seeing my aunt and my cousin Henry; and

I asked thousand questions concerning them. It however appeared that Mr. Forsyth himself had not seen them since the death of Mr. Wakefield, on which occasion he went to Sheffield to attend the funeral and to counsel the widow as to the best course she could adopt with reference to the difficulties in which her husband's loss had suddenly plunged her. All I could therefore ascertain was, that my aunt Wakefield must be about six-and-thirty years of age and my cousin Harry about twelve. It appeared that Mrs. Wakefield had written to Mr. Forsyth to consult him as to the best means of getting her son into a respectable free-school where the old gentleman had some little influence; but before he would use it, he, with characteristic caution desired to have a better knowledge of the lad himself. Thus—after much hesitation and with considerable reluctance—he had determined to stretch a point and go to the expense of entertaining Mrs. Wakefield and Henry for an entire week. Perhaps the old gentleman likewise deemed it his duty to afford me an opportunity of becoming acquainted with my relatives, whom I had never yet seen and had only distantly heard of.

Furniture was hired—(my grandfather would have thought it an unpardonable waste of money to purchase the articles)—for a couple of the long shut-up chambers; and on the appointed day my aunt and cousin arrived. A pale, pretty, lady like woman, with the sweetest and most amiable expression of countenance,—and a tall, genteel, slender lad, looking two years older than he really was, with a profile of remarkable classic beauty and large brown eyes shaded by ebon lashes,—these were the relatives to whom I was now introduced, and who received me in their arms. I wept for very joy. The old cheerless house seemed irradiated with their presence; and there was the exquisite charm of novelty in the excitement attending their arrival. And then too, it was so sweet for me, who had never known any other relation than my old, withered, cadaverous grandfather, to be clasped in the arms of those who appeared perfectly beautiful in my eyes. My aunt treated me as one whom she had long yearned to behold, but from whom circumstances had kept her apart. She smiled and wept upon me, pressing me again and again to her bosom. As for my cousin,—with the natural frankness of truly generons heart, he seemed determined to become intimate with me at once: there was no cold ceremony, no awakward shyness nor reserve on his part—and we were soon "Cousin Harry" and "Cousin Nelly" to one another.

How happily passed that week! It constituted one of those periods which are marked with golden letters in the existence of mortals. It was in the middle of summer, during the vacation of Mrs. Kelly's school; and therefore I was enabled to devote all my time to my aunt Wakefield and my cousin Harry. I liked Harry from the very first moment: there was something so cordial without absolute forwardness in his manner—something so frank and open-hearted that it was impossible to help being pleased with him—almost fascinated, if I may apply such a term to the feelings of a girl of ten years of age, as I was at that time.

One day I found myself alone with my aunt Wakefield—Mr. Forsyth having gone with Henry to visit the master of the free-school in a neighbouring town. My aunt questioned me upon a variety of subjects; and though I was too

ng and inexperienced at the time to comprehend the considerate delicacy with which her queries were put,—yet at later periods, when I have recalled to mind the particulars of that interview, I have seen and appreciated all which I was then unable to understand. She evidenly strove to glean whether I was happy with my grandfather—whether Mrs. Parks was kind to me—and whether I had a sufficiency of necessaries and comforts. I wore my best apparel all the time my aunt and Henry were at the house; and I did not like to tell Mrs. Wakefield that ordinarily in the week-days I felt that I was shabby and that I had even been taunted with that shabbiness by my schoolfellows. I endeavoured to give the most satisfactory answers to all questions; for indeed I was naturally of a contented, but shy and timid disposition. I spoke highly of Mrs. Kelly; and my aunt went with me to call upon this lady, that she might personally thank her for all her goodness towards me.

"I can assure you, my dear madam," said the kindhearted dame "Ellen is quite a pet of mine; but she deserves it. She is very pretty, though I ought not to say so in her presence: but what is far better, she is good. As for her intelligence it is truly remarkable—and she is very fond of learning."

"Do you not think she is rather delicate?" I heard my aunt ask in a whisper, but which was nevertheless just audible to my years.

"No—her health is good," replied Mrs. Kelly. "She has attended my school for the last four years, and has never had a day's illness. She is tall for her age—she is only ten, you know—and she looks twelve. Her figure is slender —but so genteel! In short, my dear madam, she is the genteelest-looking as well as the prettiest and the best girl in my school. I am very much mistaken if she will not grow up to be a most lovely creature. Did you ever see such silky black hair, with such a raven gloss upon it—such superb dark eyes—such sweet features, especially those vermilion lips of her, with that beautiful smile!"

"Yes—she is all that," answered Mrs. Wakefield; "and I hope——"

But here she stopped short, and heaved a profound sigh.

"You hope that her grandpapa," added Mrs. Kelly, "will make such provisions as shall place her under proper guardianship at his death. But you yourself, my dear madam, will doubtless become her guardian?"

Mrs. Wakefield gave some response which did not reach my ears, I was sitting in the window-recess of the little parlour where this discourse took place; and I could not help overhearing it. But I was looking through the window—or rather my face, was turned that way; and therefore neither the schoolmistress nor my aunt had any reason to suspect that I *did* overhear them. The conversation made a deep impression on my mind; and therefore I have recorded it here. It was the first time I ever knew that I had the slightest claim to good looks. Mrs. Parks had been wont to praise my proficiencies in study—but never my personal beauty. It would be a miserable affectation to pretend that I was aot pleased on learning tbat I was considered pretty: but the knowledge thereof did not instil the faintest tincture of vanity in my mind. All the value which according to the girlish notions of my naturally shy disposition, I attached to the beauty of personal appearance, was

centred in the hope that it might render me more pleasing to those whose good opinion I esteemed.

On returning with my aunt to the house, we continued to discourse together; and I at length timidly ventured to ask some question relative to my parents. I say timidly—because I had noticed that my grandfather was invariably either annoyed or afflicted whenever I had questioned him on the same subject. I now perceived that Mrs. Wakefield averted her countenance; and, as I continued to gaze npon her, I observed that the tears were trickling down her pale cheeks. I threw myself into her arms, beseeching her to forgive me for having touched upon a topic which made her weep.

"You have no forgiveness to ask, my dear child," she responded: "the question was natural—equally natural too is that I should weep on account of your parents. They are lost to you my poor child —— were lost to you in your infancy! Would that it had been permitted to me to supply the place of your mother: but circumstances prevented it!"

For some few moments I was half suffocated with my own tears and sobs; and then I asked, "How old was I, dear aunt, when my parents died?"

"Why do you put this question, Ellen?" inquired Mrs. Wakefield, looking fixedly upon my countenance as I gazed up at her.

I blushed and became confused: but quickly recovering my frank and artless self-possession, I looked up into her face again, and candidly revealed that idea which had ever appeared to haunt me like the reminiscence of something which had actually happened at the earlies period of my consciousness of existence. Mrs. Wakefield listened with what I fancied to be a sad and mournful interest; and when I had finished speaking, she said. "Banish this idea, my sweet child, from your mind. It is a delusion under which you are labouring—it has no foundation in fact:"—and them after a few moments pause, she added in a still lower tone, at the same time bending her face down until it almost touched mine, and pressing her hand caressingly over the masses of my dark hair—"You lost your parents, Ellen, when you were too young to know them."

Almost immediately after these words were spoken, I beheld my grandfather and Harry pass the window; and I bounded a way to open the front door for them. At the instant I opened the parlour door, I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Parks hastening along the passage to the staircase; and the suspicion flashed to my mind that she had been listening to the discourse between my aunt and myself. I scarcely know why I should have thought so; for the old housekeeper might just as well have been coming from the kitchen, or from one of the back rooms, as to have been passing away from the vicinage of the paralour-door. Nevertheless, the idea *did* occur to me; and it excited a momentary trouble in my mind. But I speedily forgot the incident when my cousin Harry came bounding joyously towards me, exclaiming that Mr. Forsyth had procured him the promise of admittance to the free Grammar school after the current vacation.

Happiness was dancing in my cousin's handsome brown eyes; and my heart thrilled with the transfusing influence of the joy which he thus experienced. He ran to embrace his mother, and acquaint her with the good tidings—for which

she warmly expressed her gratitude to Mr. Forsyth.

On the following day aunt Wakefield and cousin Harry took their departure: tears were upon their cheeks—and torrents were raining down my own, as they bestowed upon me the farewell embraces. And when they were gone, how I missed them both!—how I continued to weep as I looked at the vacant seats, where I no longer encountered the kind dove-like regards of my affectionate aunt, nor the ingenuous expression of my cousin's dark-brown eyes. And how cheerless the old house appeared again——Oh, how cheerless!

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGER.

About six months had elapsed after the visit of Mrs. Wakefield and her son; and during this interval I received two or three kind letters from them both. Harry was installed at the seminary where the benevolence of some long-deceased philanthropist had provided that a certain number of fatherless boys should be genteeely educated for a sum so small that it was almost nominal. My cousin was delighted with the establishment; and he declared that he should do his best to profit by the advantages of instruction which were thus afforded him.

It was one afternoon, a half-holiday—I remember it full well—in the middle of December, in the year 1832—I was sitting alone with my grandfather in the parlour, Mrs. Parks being temporarily absent at the time. It was about three o'clock; and the dusk was closing in thus early in the depth of that winter-season. We were close by the window; and I had some ten minutes back laid aside my book, in consequence of the growing obscurity. Mr. Forsyth had been talking to me: but there was at the moment a pause in the conversation. All of a sudden I beheld a man, who was muffled in an ample cloak, and who wore a somewhat battered hat, the broad brims of which slouched, stop in front of the house and look up at it. For a few moments I thought nothing particular of the incident: but as the individual remained there in the middle of that narrow street—now looking up and down, and then up at the house again—I directed my grandfather's attention to the person. At the same instant the individual came close up to the window, and deliberately looked over the blind. The dusk was not too great to prevent me from easily observing all this—nor to prevent the man himself from seeing into the room, where the fire (never too good a one in that parlour) was throwing a glimmering light around.

My grandfather uttered some ejaculation—started—then sank back into the seat again—and appeared to be smitten with a sudden trouble, or else with illness. I was alarmed, and besought him to tell me what was the matter. Then I looked again to the window:—the man was gone.

Mr. Forsyth could not speak: a strange terror appeared to have come over him: he was half choking—and he gazed at me with a ghastly expression. At the same instant I heard the latch-key moving in the front door lock: I knew it was Mrs. Parks who was entering; and I rushed out of the room to summon her to my grandfather. The man in the cloak pushed rudely and roughly by the old woman—pushed by

me also—and made his way into the parlour.

"Ah! it is you?" gasped my grandfather; and he rose up from his seat, tottering and staggering.

"Oh, you know me, then?" said the man, tossing off his battered hat: and then turning towards me, he said "Ah! is this the girl? Come——But pshaw!" and all in a moment his tone and his manner appeared to express some feeling of contempt with which he was smitten on his own acoount.

"Leave us, Ellen—leave us Ellen," said my grandfather, in accents which were so tremulous with emotion that instead of obeying his mandate, I rushed towards him.

Seizing his hand, I exclaimed, "Do not send me from you! You are ill—you are frightened!—— What does this man want?"

"Go, Ellen—go!" said my grandfather, now speaking with a sudden sternness. "I insist upon your leaving us! This is a—a—man —a—a gentleman—who has come to me on business."

"To be sure!" said the stranger: and he coolly seated himself.

I was now compelled to obey my grandfather: but I did so most reluctantly: and on quitting the parlour, I beheld Mrs. Parks standing at the foot of the staircase. She impatiently beckoned me towards her; and then said in a whisper, "Go up-stairs for the present, Miss Ellen: you see that your grandfather wants to be alone."

I obeyed; and for half-an-hour I sat in my own chamber up-stairs, with a deeply-troubled mind, and marvelling what that stranger could want—who he could possibly be—and what meant his singular expressions and conduct in reference to myself. The dusk deepened into darkness; and there I remained, in my chamber, not liking to go down-stairs again until I might receive permission to that effect. Mrs. Parks had not come up with me: she had remained below—but whether to enter the parlour or to attend to her avocations elsewhere, I knew not. That she herself had some inkling of the man's business, whatever it were, I entertained the suspicion; and I could not help thinking that even if she had not penetrated into the parlour to join in the discourse she was listening at the door.

I strove to recollect the stranger's appearance as well as I could—though in the confusion of the scene and the obscurity of the room I had not been enabled to observe him much more minutely than when I had just before seen him in the street. So far as I recollected or could estimate, he was about forty years of age, with a dark, weather-beaten countenance, and a piercing pair of black eyes. I knew that he was of tall stature; and his garments indicated poverty. His voice was rough, and even coarse in its accents: and there was a mingled insolence, confidence, and hardihood in his speech and manner, so that he almost seemed as if he felt conscious of some power to command a reception, even though it were not a welcome one, in my grandfather's parlour.

I had been frightened by the incident; and as darkness was closing in around, cold nervous terrors crept over me. Gradually into my mind came the recollection that I had heard some vague and uncertain whispers of how a long time back a murder had been committed within the walls of that house; and I trembled from head to foot as I shudderingly swept my looks around with the hideous apprehension that

shall come in with me, [illegible] your grandpapa. I hope he is better. But—but—my dear child—you need not say you saw Mrs. Parks here—He only just dropped in to ask how your dear grandpapa is; and it might annoy the old gentleman to think that visitors came while he is lying ill in bed and unable to receive them."

I was thinking so much of my poor grandfather at the time, and was so impatient to get to him that I readily promised to follow Mrs. Parks's injunction. For the rest of that day I was almost entirely by the sick couch. The following day was the Sabbath: I went to church with my school-girls in the morning as usual; and for the remainder of that day also I ministered to my invalid relative. I feared that he was getting worse, though he declared that he was better, and that some medicine for which he had sent from the chemist's, was doing him a world of good. And so indeed it appeared: for on the ensuing morning Mr. Forsyth declared that he was almost well enough to get up, and that therefore I might go to school.

I did so: but when I went home to dinner at one o'clock, as usual, I found my grandfather still in bed; and when I again returned at five to tea, I felt convinced that he was worse than he had yet been. Young though I was, something told me that he was sinking. I besought him to take a glass of wine. At first he vowed that such extravagance would be his ruin: but he evidently felt that he wanted it; and this feeling got the better of his niggardness. He took some wine; and then he slept soundly for several hours.

It was near ten o'clock that evening when he awoke; and he declared that he was so much better that I might retire to my own chamber with the conviction of finding him convalescent in the morning. I withdrew accordingly, my heart full of hope: but on seeking my room I did not experience the faintest inclination for slumber. I knelt down and prayed that heaven would spare my grandfather yet awhile, and that his words might be fulfilled relative to the improvement of his health within the lapse of the next twelve hours. Then I sat upon my pallet, giving way to thought—wondering whether Mr. Parks would sit up all night with my grandfather—and if she did not, whether he might not require some ministration while she slept? I knew that the servant-girl would not be employed for such a purpose; and then I thought to myself it would be cruel for a woman of the housekeeper's age to be deprived of her natural rest night after night, as she had probably been.

I gently opened the door of communication between [illegible] two chambers: Mrs. Parks was not there. I thought that I would descend—just see how my grandfather was getting on—and beg Mrs. Parks to awake me at three or four in the morning, so that I might take her place by the sick couch and she might have an opportunity of a few hours' repose. Gently I crept down the staircase, without a light: noiselessly did I open the door of office; and I was advancing through this room, when certain words which came from the inner one transfixed me to the spot.

"And if you do not fulfil the oath you have taken—if you fail in one single particular—may the curse of a dying man cling to you for the remainder of your existence!—may it poison the very springs of that existence!—may it stifle your last prayer in your throat when your own time shall also come!—and

may it hurry your soul into everlasting perdition!"

These were the terrific, the fearful, the appalling words which came upon my ears, smiting my very brain as it were with blow upon blow—making my hair stand on end—curdling my young blood in my veins.

And in what an altered voice too were those syllables spoken!—as if that voice were contending difficulty and painfully with a hoarse impeding rattling in the throat; and as if the strongest efforts were repaired to enable it to dominate over the gaspings which would otherwise have convulsed and strangled.

"I have sworn," replied Mrs. Parks. "What deeper oath can I take? and why, sir, do you seem to doubt me?"

"I don't say that I doubt you," answered my grandfather, as if testity and irritably: "but I know the world so well that even the spectacles of death-beds do not always——Ah!" and he gasped——"make survivors do their duty. My death-bed is mean, wretched, and desolate enough! I feel it now—I know it now! I might have had friends around me—relatives also ——But no!"

There was another painful gasp; and then my grandfather added, "Here I am friendless—forlorn—a wretched old man!"

"Cease these lamentations, dear sir," said the housekeeper. "Shall I give you water? you have more to tell me——"

"Yes—and I must make haste," continued my grandfather; "for my strength is failing me. Ah! this change which took place so suddenly——"

Here he gasped again: his voice seemed choking; methought he must be dying. I glided through the office:—the reader will have understood that the door of his chamber stood partially open; and I had reached the threshold above the half-dozen steps which led up into it, when again was I transfixed—petrified—with the blood congealed in my veins, by the next words which came from my grandfather's lips.

"Yes—may my withering, blighting curse cling to you if you violate your oath! May it wrap itself around you like a poisoned garment—eating into your flesh—devouring the tendous—scorching the fibres—searching, burning, and rotting your very nerves! On the other hand my blessing—the blessing of heaven, and of all the angels in it, will be yours if you act faithfully to your solemn, sacred vow!"

"I will, sir—I will!" said Mrs. Parks. "Go on, sir!—I beseech you to finish!"

"There—in that bureau," resumed my grandfather, speaking with increasing difficulty, "there is a secret recess—it is behind the middle drawer—you press upon what seems to be the head of a screw—it touches a spring—the receptacle becomes revealed. The document is there! Take it—act as I have told you—act as you yourself have sworn—and may heaven bless you!"

I was standing, as I have said, upon the threshold; and from that point, by leaning slightly forward, I could look into the interior of the chamber. The light of a solitary candle played with flickering sickliness upon the ghastly countenance of the old man—that countenance which, hsbitually cadaverous was now yellow and corpselike as he sat up in the miserable bed, pointing with his lank lean hand towards the escritoire. The housekeeper had her back towards me: she was standing by the side of the couch; and I could not catch a glimpse of her face. I felt an inclination to pre-

cipitate myself into my grandfather's arms; but the spell of mingled awe and terror was upon me—my feet seemed rooted to the sport. The candle was upon a table close under the window; the night was beautifully clear—the moon was shining—and there was a hard frost. Just at the very instant that my grandfather had given utterance to those last words, while still pointing to the escritoire—and with the feeble rays of the candle playing upon his ghastly countenance—*another countenance* appeared.

It was at the window: some one looked in unto the room. I knew the face in a moment;—it was that of the stranger whose visit two years back had so much troubled me!

"There! there!—'tis he!" exclaimed the dying man: and almost at the same instant a scream thrilled from my own lips.

The countenance diappeared from the window: the housekeeper started as if galvanized: my grandfather lay gasping in the last agonies of existence. I flew towards him—I knelt by the side of the bed; and taking his hand, strained it to my lips. He knew me: he made an effort to say something—but he could not. He pressed my hand: more audibly sounded the dedly rattle in his throat—and in a few moment all was silent, save the expression of my agony!

Oh! deep was the anguish which I experienced for a few minutes; and then there came the awful, the solemn, the almost-stupefying conviction that I was looking upon death for the first time. This sensation was gradually absorbed in a certain indescribable numbness of feeling; and how long I remained in that state I can scarcely tell. I recollect that Mrs. Parks, speaking to me with every appearance of the utmost kindness and sympathy, induced me to leave the chamber of death: and she led me to my own room. There she assured me that I should always find a friend in her, and that she would never desert me. Oh! how necessary consolation was to me *then!* I forgot her ugliness—I forgot the sinister expression of her looks—I fergot the suspicions of her sincerity which had so often floated in my mind. Tears came to my relief; I wept in hot arms—I thanked her for all she was saying to me.

Gently did she continue to speak. She asked me how long I had been upon the threshold of she chamber; I frankly told her wherefore I had descended from my room—how long I had been listening—everything I had heard—and what I had seen at the window.

She listened with the deepest attention; and when I had finished, she said, "Yes, my sweet child—your poor dear grandfather made me swear that I would never desert you; and I will not! I dare say the paper in the escoritre contains an account of whatever little money he may possess——I know it cannot be much; for, as you have seen he war very poor. But whatever the amount, it is all for your benefit. As for that stranger who dared to look in at the window——"

"Is he indeed a stranger to you?" I asked.

"Assuredly!" responded Mrs. Parks. "I never saw him before that time, you know——But I daresay he is some evil-intentioned man; and we must guard against him. Now get to bed, my dear child—and sleep, if possible.

"One word more!" I said, almost suffocated with the anguish that oppressed me. "Must I not write to my aunt and cousin to-morrow to tell them of the dreadful thing that has happened?"

Mrs. Parks appeared to reflect

deeply for a few minutes; and then she said with a quickness as if there had really been no necessity for such deliberation, "Oh! certainly, my dear child! By all means write to your relations to-morrow?"

On the following day I wrote accordingly. In the evening, when I was seated with the housekeeper in the little parlour, and tearfully and mournfully I was speaking of my grandfather's death, she renewed all her protestations of unutterable kindness.

"But there is one thing, my dear child, I wish to impress upon you," continued Mrs. Parks. "It would not be well to mention to Mrs. Wakefield—not indeed to any living soul—the circumstances attending the poor dear gentleman's death. Everyone would be horrified to think that instead of spending his last moments in prayer, he should have given himself up altogether to wordly considerations. The clergyman, you know, would not afford him Christian burial if he knew it!"

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated, shocked at the idea. "I would not for the world give utterance to a syllable that should produce so frightful a result!"

"And therefore, my dear child," continued Mrs. Parks, "you need only say that you were present at your grandfather's death, and that you heard him confide yourself to my charge, according to the provisions of a document which he placed at my disposal. And as there should be nothing of a horrid or shocking character told about a death-bed, you need not speak of the appearance of that impudent evil-disposed stranger at the window."

Conceiving Mrs. Parks's arguments and recommendations to be strictly reasonable—and indeed admiring her for what I fancied to be her regard for the reputation of her deceased master—I readily promised to follow her counsel.

In the evening of the ensuing day my aunt and cousin arrived at the house: and with tears again streaming from my eyes, was I received in their embrace. Few were the questions put to me in reference to my grandfather's death. I answered them in accordance with the recommendations of the housekeeper; and not being pressed on any particular point, there was not the slightest necessity for evasion, much less untruthfulness on my part.

CHAPTER III.

VARIOUS CHANGES OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

THE funeral took place in a very quiet and private manner; for the deceased had no friends to follow his remains to the grave, and no relatives nor family-connexions besides myself, Mrs. Wakefield, and Harry. Mrs. Parks however begged of my aunt as a favour that her son Thomas might be allowed to attend the internment,—the old woman alleging that he had always been very much attached to the deceased. As for myself I was overwhelmed with affliction when I beheld the coffin borne out of the house; and it was long ere Mrs. Wakefield could succeed in consoling me. Even then I begged that I might be permitted to shut myself up alone in my chamber for a few hours;—and this I did.

It was evening when I descended again to the parlour; and there I found Mrs. Parks seated with her son, Mrs. Wakefield, and Harry. My aunt wept as she strained me in her arms; and I could not help thinking that there was in her caresses the evidence of a commiseration and

[illegible]at where my bed-chamber was situated; and a voice said, "Good-bye, then, for the last time."

That voice completely galvanized me; and I started up in my bed. I recognised it in a moment!—it was the voice of that stranger whose visit to the house at Leeds upwards of two years back had produced such an effect upon my grandfather,—the stranger whose countenance I had seen at the window of his chamber on the night of his death! An unknown terror seized on me as I thus started up in my couch; my soul seemed smitten with an unaccountable trouble—for an ominous mystery appeared to invest that stranger.

"Good-bye, for the last time!" were the words he had spoken.

"Hush!" I immediately heard both Mrs. Parks and her son say, as if speaking in the same breath: and then Parks himself added, "Yes—and take care that it *is* for the last time: or else——"

But I heard no more: the voice appeared suddenly to cease;—and if more were said, it must have been in the lowest possible whisper. Almost immediately afterwards I heard the front door of the house close; and then getting out of bed, I shut my own chamber door, which by an accident I had left open. Yes—I shut it, because I did not choose that Mrs. Parks, when ascending to her own bedroom, should have reason to think that I had been listening; for she might fancy I had done so on purpose. But it was still a long time before sleep visited my eyes. I lay awake, asking myself over and over again who that stranger could be, and what he could possibly want with Mrs. Parks and her son? Indeed, I was astounded that they should have received him at all, after the way in which she had spoken to me of his unpardonable insolence in looking in at the window on the night of my grandfather's death—and still more especially after the opinion she had expressed that he was an evil disposed person. But, as a matter of course, conjecture helped me not to any solution of the mystery; and in the midst of my bewildering ruminations I sank into slumber.

On the following day I entered as a boarder at the school in the neighbourhood of Chelsea. It is not my intention to dwell at unnecessary length upon this period of my existence: but still some few brief observations are necessary. I was well treated at the school, and was as liberally supplied with pocket-money as the rest of the young ladies. Amongst them was one named Juliet Norman; and with her I became most intimate. This friendship which sprang up between us, was all the more remarkable inasmuch as her disposition was so different from mine; for whereas I was timid, bashful, reserved and pensive, as well as exceedingly studious, she, on the other hand, was forward, gay volatile, giddy, and idle. There was however nothing bad about her; and she was thoroughly good-natured. She was very handsome, and about two years older than myself. What her parents were I never knew while at school: for she rarely spoke of them—and I noticed that on three or four occasions some allusion was made to her father and mother in the spirit of a spiteful taunt by some of our school-companions. The subject was evidently a sore one with Juliet Norman—but I could not conceive why: for that her parents were wealthy, was apparent from the fact that she herself was the best-

dressed young lady in the school, and she had more presents from home than any one else. Her father and mother moreover occasionally visited her in their carriage; and therefore I was naturally at a loss to conceive why Juliet should have any reason to be ashamed of her parentage. I never touched upon the subject in her presence; and I had not the curiosity to put a question thereon to any of the other girls.

As for the friendship which sprang up between Juliet and myself—I suppose it was from the circumstance that she attached herself to me almost from the very first day of my entering the school; and being a senior girl, she had opportunities of showing me kindnesses, for which I was grateful. Though indolent herself, she did not seek to draw me away from my own studies: on the contrary, she commended my diligence—and with a sigh that was stifled in a laugh, expressed the wish that she herself resembled me. She remained two years at the school after I entered it; and then she returned no more—nor did I hear of her again until we met in the great world, as I shall presently have to explain.

When the first vacation arrived, Mrs. Parks came to fetch me home; and instead of taking me to a lodging, it was to a handsome well-furnished house in a genteel part of the town. She kept a footman and three female servants; and as the reader may suppose, I was astonished. But still I dared ask no questions; and still no explanations were given. An elegant chamber was assigned to my use; and the treatment I experienced was that of unchanging kindness. I had already written to my aunt and cousin from school, to tell them how happily I was situated: I now wrote again to acquaint them with Mrs. Parks's prosperity, and the luxurious manner in which she lived. The replies forward by Mrs. Wakefield and Harry, expressed their joy to observe that I wrote so cheerfully, and my aunt's letter was worded in a style which indicated not the least surprise at the account I had given of Mrs. Parks's opulence. I should add that her son Thomas was now settled in London: he was no longer an attorney's clerk—he lived with his wife and family in a house as handsome as that of his mother; and a brass plate on the door indicated that he himself was a solicitor.

Upwards of three years passed, during which I remained at the school, but regularly spending the holidays with Mr. Parks. I frequently corresponded with my aunt and cousin—but did not see them the whole time. Mrs. Wakefield invited me to visit them at Sheffield; but Mrs. Parks declared that her attachment for me was too great to permit her to lose me for even a few days during the vacation. I was now sixteen; and I understood that I was only to remain another year at the seminary; but an incident suddenly occurred which caused my prompt removal thence, and introduced another important change into my circumstances.

One afternoon I was sent for into the parlour, and was informed by the schoolmistress that my kind guardian—as she denominated Mrs. Parks—had been seized with a most dangerous illness, and that I was to go home to her immediately. Her son's carriage—(for the thriving solicitor kept his equipage now)—had been sent to fetch me. On my arrival at the house I saw that all the blinds were drawn down: the spectacle gave me a cruel shock—and the tale which it told was true: Mrs. Parks had ceased to exist. It

admirably did his personal appearance fulfil all the promises of the earlier period! There was still a certain softness in his masculine beauty: the classic features had lost none of their delicate outlines: the dark hair curled naturally about the well-shaped head, as when in his boyhood I had admired it; and there was a world of intelligence and thought in the handsome dark-brown eyes. His forehead was high and smooth, and shining with the light of intelligence. In figure he was slender, upright as a dart, and with a lithe elasticity of form that was perfectly consistent with manly elegance and grace. No wonder that his loving mother should have been proud of such a son!

There was, as I have said, a sudden bashfulness on the part of both Henry and myself as we thus met after a separation of nearly five years: but he was the first to conquer that awkwardness; and embracing me, the words "Cousin Nelly" again issued from his lips. Then he began telling me how tall I had grown, and how surprised he at the first instant was at the change and improvement which had taken place in me—though, as he added with a smile, he ought to have anticipated both. I did not tell him that precisely the same thoughts had been revolving in my own mind in respect to himself; for there was still a certain timidity and bashfulness of feeling which I could not so readily overcome.

Weeks passed by—they grew into months—and the more I saw of my cousin, the better I liked him. His affection towards his mother—his brotherly kindness towards myself, were never for an instant checked or ruffled by the slightest change of humour. He was cheerful without levity, and gave without thoughtlessness. His disposition was sanguine and enthusiatic: he longed to have an opportunity of entering upon some career in the great world, that he might exert all his energies and prove to his affectionate mother how anxious he was to get on. But it was not so easy to afford him this opening; for Mrs. Wakefield knew not precisely in what profession to embark him, and he himself had no choice. He was in the habit of deferring to the opinion of his mother; and she in this respect had none to give. She had no relatives to assist her with their counsel; and the retired manner in which her circumstances had compelled her to live, had prevented her from maintaining an intimacy with the few friends she possessed at the time of her husband's death. In a word, she had a son whose education fitted him for anything, but for whom she could do nothing.

I saw that all this was beginning to prey upon my aunt's mind, and one day, when alone with her, I took an opportunity of alluding to certain plans which had been for weeks in my thoughts.

"It is time, my dear aunt," I said, "that I should think of doing something for myself. I have received a good education—and—and—I have entertained an idea——I believe, in short, that I am fitted for a governess I could begin as a nursery-governess, you know—with young children—and then, as I get on——"

"How can I suffer you to go out alone in the world, dear Ellen?" interrupted my aunt, caressing me affectionately.

"And how can I continue a burden to your slender resources?" I exclaimed, with tears in my eyes. "No, no—I cannot! My cousin Harry —"

"Ah!" said my aunt, with a deep sigh; "if he were only provided for—if he could obtain some situation——But you see, Ellen, there is no opening, unless it be as a junior clerk in some establishment—and then the salary is so small and the work is so laborious——"

"Dear aunt," I said, "my own mind is made up! Let me endeavour to earn my livelihood. I *must* do so sooner or later—and why not commence now? Oh, I should be so happy if eating the bread of my own industry; and then you have leisure to look out for something suitable for Harry——At all events you would not have me to maintain in idleness."

A great deal more conversation took place, which I need not however describe: suffice it to say that I at length succeeded in wringing a consent, though a reluctant one, from Mrs. Wakefield, that I should carry my design into execution. I did not however mention it to Henry; and I found that my aunt herself kept silent upon the point. There seemed to be a sort of tacit understanding between us that we would not broach until the last minute a topic which we knew would sadden him.

I wrote up to Mr. Parks in London, explaining to him my wishes and intentions, and begging that he would interest himself amongst his numerous friends and connexions to procure me some such situation as I desired. He wrote a somewhat cold and distant reply, to the effect that my application arrived at an unfortunate moment, as he was just on the point of starting with his wife and some of his family on a continental trip; but that he had done for me all that lay in his power, by inserting half a dozen advertisements in the London papers "at his own expense." When I showed this letter to m[illegible], she sighed, shook her head slightly, and said, "He who became enriched through the medium of your grandfather and to the prejudice of yourself, should have done more of you!"

This observation gave rise to a discourse upon past topics; and with some little hesitation, I said, "You remember, my dear aunt, that when in London you led me to understand that after the funeral of Mrs. Parks you might give me some explanations——"

"No, my dear child, you are mistaken," interrupted Mrs. Wakefield. "I had already explained everything that was necessary; and if I said that we could wait ere we discussed any plans for the future, it was only because I wished to see whether Mrs. Parks would remember you in her will."

"But, my dear aunt, relative to that stranger—that man of whom I spoke to you——"

"Of him I have nothing to say, Ellen."

The discourse was thus cut short—not with petulance by my aunt, because an angry impatience was incompatible with the sweetness of her disposition—but with a certain serious firmness which forbade me from returning to the topic.

In the course of about ten days I received a letter, written in an elegant female hand, and which was in answer to the advertisements inserted in the London papers. It set forth that the writer was the wife of Colonel Lennie—that they had two little girls of the respective ages, of six and eight, who were too delicate to be sent to school, and for whom a genteel governess was required. It further appeared that the terms in which my advertisements had been worded—or rather those which Mrs. Parks had inserted on my behalf—precisely depicted

perfe[illegible]lar, [illegible]e somewhat largely [illegible]ed. She had a fine acquiline profile—rich full lips—and a chin which being slightly prominent, and rounded so as to complete the oval of her countenance, gave to that countenance a somewhat voluptuous expression. She possessed a splendid set of teeth: her neck was long and arching—her bust had the development of a Hebe, with an admirable slope of the shoulders: but her waist was of a wasp-like thinness, and her figure had all the lightness of a sylph with its tall graceful stature and with its sweeping length of limb. I had known her at school as giddy, gay, and volatile, but with nothing mischievous in her disposition, and ever obliging and good-natured: I had not now been half-an-hour in her society before I discovered that these characteristics of my friend Juliet had continued unchanged—while they had acquired the addition of a certain little coquetry, as if she knew that she was handsome and courted admiration.

The tale of the villanous trick which I had been played, was narrated over again to Mr. Norman; and he expressed his sympathy in the kindest terms. He bade me make his home as long as ever I thought fit; and Mrs. Norman literally overwhelmed me with her caresses and her attentions. At half-past six o'clock we descended to the dining-room, where an elegant repast was served up; and a variety of wines appeared upon the board. I could not help observing that Mr. and Mrs. Norman drank a great deal of champagne, and that even Juliet herself partook of three or four glasses without the slightest pressing, and with the air of one who was merely following an ordinary custom. A footman and page, both in elegant liveries, waited at table; indeed the handsome style in which the house was furnished, and the way in which the Normans lived, indicated that they were very well off.

At about ten o'clock Juliet considerately observed to me that she felt convinced I must be very much fatigued after travelling all the way from Sheffield; and she offered to conduct me to my chamber. I thankfully accepted the proposal: and she led me to an exquisitely-furnished apartment, with a dressing-room adjoining. There she left me, with an intimation that I must not think of getting up in the morning until I felt quite disposed, as they were very late people.

I slept soundly enough that night, for I was indeed very much fatigued: but I awoke at my usual hour in the morning—namely, at about seven o'clock. The house was perfectly silent: there did not even appear to be a servant moving about. I therefore lay another hour; and then I got up. I was just finishing my toilet, when Juliet, with nothing on but a morning wrapper, and her naked feet thrust into slippers—her beautiful hair floating in luxuriant negligence over her half naked shoulders—came gliding into the room. She was surprised to find that I was not only up, but so nearly dressed: and flinging herself with an air of langour into a large easy chair, she said, "I should have lain in bed for at least another hour; but I came to assure myself that you had everything you required. Dear me! you are dressing without a fire—and it is bitterly cold! No hot water either! My dear Ellen, why did you not ring the ball for one of the maids?"

I assured Miss Norman that I did not find the chamber so cold as she represented it, and that I had not needed anything at the hands of the servants.

"Well, now that you are dressed," she exclaimed, starting up from her chair and performing what appeared to me a sort of pirouette, "come to my room and let us chat while I drag myself through the details of my own toilet. Breakfast will not be ready for the next hour—and besides, we have plenty of things to talk about."

I accompanied Miss Norman to her chamber, which was fitted up in the most elegant and luxurious manner. The draperies of the windows and of the French bedstead were crimson, with a rich yellow border: a cheerful fire was blazing in the grate; and near it a sofa was placed in the best position for anyone sitting or reclining upon it to receive the full benefit of the heat thrown out. A superb looking-glass surmounted a mantel covered with costly ornaments and nick-nacks. The toilet-table was arranged with an elegance amounting to the most refined fastidiousness; and near it was a full-length mirror or psyche. A half-opened door afforded a glimpse of a bath room furnished with every luxurious appliance for such a place. The feet trod upon a carpet of uncommon thickness: the atmosphere of the chamber was warm and perfumed; and it altogether seemed adapted for a lady of rank and quality.

"In order that we may converse without restraint," said Juliet, seating herself at the toilet-table, "I will dispense with the attendance of my maid; and I can assure you, dear Ellen," she added, with one of her merry laughs, "it is a great sacrifice I am making on your account."

"Then wherefore do it?" I asked.

"We have nothing of such very great importance to say to each other for the present—unless indeed you mean to advise me how I ought to act in the circumstances in which I am placed; and t[illegible]ould be most kind of you."

"I think, my dear Ellen," proceeded Juliet, now beginning to comb out the rich masses of her hair, "that you have some little secret to learn; for it strikes me, from two or three things you said last evening, that you are really unacquainted with the profession, avocation, employment—or whatever you may choose to call it—which my parents and I pursue."

"I should conceive Mr. Norman to be a gentleman of independent property," I observed; and then I recollected how, when at school, Juliet had so seldom alluded to her parents, and how when she happened to provoke any other girl, some mysteriously-significant taunt was thrown out in reference to her parentage.

"Independent means indeed!" cried Juliet, with a laugh: but almost immediately becoming serious, she added, "I do not really think that my father is independent of the world to the amount of fifty guineas. But he has an excellent salary—my mother likewise—and I also am very well paid."

At this moment Juliet, shaking back her glossy tresses over her superb shoulders of milky whiteness, happened to look round towards the place where I was seated; and she perceived that I was surveying her with astonishment.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, bursting out into another gay light laugh; "I forgot that I was talking too fast, and speaking of salaries without telling you how they are earned. In a word, my dear Ellen,"—and now she grew serious once more—"my father is an actor, my mother an actress, and I am a ballet-dancer."

For a few moments I was so surprised by these announcements

as to be rendered perfectly speechless; and I have no doubt that I surveyed Juliet in a manner which naturally led to the inference that her next observations implied.

"I hope, my dear Ellen," she said, "you do not think the worse of us on this account? I remember that when at school the girls used sometimes to taunt me with the fact that my father was what they used to call a playactor and my mother a play-actress; but I likewise recollect that you never displayed any curiosity to know what their allusions meant. I was *then* ashamed of my parents' profession—I do not know why—unless it were because the girls themselves seemed to think it was something to be derived. But now I am not ashamed of it. And you, my dear Ellen ——"

"Oh! never, never," I exclaimed, with the gushing enthusiasm of my grateful heart, "can I be ashamed of those good friends whom heaven sent me in the moment of my need, and who are treating me with such kindness!"

Thus speaking, I threw my arms about Juliet's neck, and embraced her affectionately.

"I know very well," continued Miss Norman, "that it is the fashion to run down actors, actresses, and ballet-dancers in respect to their private characters; and I likewise know, alas! that there are too many on the stage whose conduct has been only too well calculated to give rise to this sweeping reflection upon the whole of us. But in all professions there are the respectable as well as the disreputable: and I flatter myself, dear Ellen, that the name of Norman has been honourably borne by my parents, and will not be disgraced by their daughter."

Juliet spoke these words with a slight flush upon the cheeks, and yet with a calm dignity which rendered her language alike impressive and touching. There was nothing giddy nor volatile about her at that moment; her speech and her demeanour indicated that if she had her gay and thoughtless intervals, she could likewise have her serious and thoughtful ones. I felt at the instant more irresistibly attracted towards her than ever;—I was inspired with the same love, and pride, and confidence on her behalf as if she were a very dear sister.

"You see," she continued, "as my parents belong to the theatrical profession, they could do nothing else with me; for these avocations are in nine cases out of ten hereditary. They educated me well, as you know——or rather they gave me the opportunities for a good education, although I am afraid I did not benefit by them so much as I ought to have done. But if I had turned out the cleverest girl in existence, what else could they have done with me except making me an actress or a dancer? For who would receive into his family as a governess the daughter of an actor and an actress? And then, too, my parents naturally have their pride; and they could not think of putting me into a shop to make a tradeswoman of me. Thus you see, my dear Ellen, persons in our profession are under the influence of circumstances which rule them imperiously.—However," added Juliet Norman, suddenly recovering all her wonted gaiety—escaping as it were from her seriousness, and smiling with the peculiar witchery which belonged to her, and which best became that rich red mouth and those brilliant teeth;—"I have inflicted upon you a very long tirade; and you may perhaps think it a laboured apology to account for the one fact, that I am a dancer!"

"And do you like the stage?" I inquired.

"Yes—it suits me well enough," responded Juliet. "I am only employed for a portion of the year—and even then my labours are not very arduous. So you see I have plenty of holidays; and this suits my somewhat indolent disposition. I have been very successful as a dancer; and I may say without vanity that I have made a little noise in the theatrical world—I have been well spoken of and well written of."

"How singular," I exclaimed, "that I never should have heard your name mentioned in connexion with these successes. I should have been so pleased!"

"Thank you, my dear Ellen—I am sure you would. It is not however at all surprising that you should have remained in the dark upon the subject——But tell me, did you never hear of a certain Mademoiselle Delessert?"

"To be sure!" I ejaculated. "I remember, during the very last vacation that I spent with the deceased Mrs. Parks, I heard her speaking with some friends relative to that *danseuse*. They had all been to see her; and they were in raptures. I was to have gone on another occasion; but something occurred to prevent it. Of course you know this Mademoiselle Delessert of whom you are speaking?"

"I know her as well as I know my ownself," exclaimed Juliet, with the merriest peal of silver laughter ringing harmoniously from her lips; "for I am Mademoiselle Delessert."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "But wherefore that assumed name?"

"Because nothing English goes down *with* the English," replied Juliet. "You see, my dear Ellen, the English are constantly boasting of everything that *is* English; and yet they patron[illegible] is foreign. In the [illegible]shionable world a gentleman must have his French valet and a lady her French maid; the cook must be French, and the dishes served upon the table must be French likewise. The hairdresser must be French; watches, lace, silks, perfumes, gloves, fashions, everything must be foreign. The gentleman will patronise a German tailor, and the lady a French milliner. Music must be foreign—singers and dancers must be foreign likewise. And then, don't you see, my dear Ellen," added Juliet, with another merry laugh, "I am not a dancer, nor an actress, nor anything at all with an English name——I am a *figurante* or an *artiste*."

"And Mr. and Mrs. Norman?" I said inquiringly.

"Oh! they keep their right names," exclaimed Juliet, "and are not compelled upon the stage to repudiate their own country and pass as the natives of another. They perform in English pieces——though, by the bye, they are only *called* English pieces because they are rendered into the English language; for the fact is that they are in reality French. In a word, everything must be foreign, or have a foreign source, or be in some way connected with something that *is* foreign, to please the English fashionable world. But I was going to observe that my father and mother are really eminent in their profession, and can always command good engagements—I mean when anything is doing in the theatrical world; because there is sometimes a lull, or a check, or a stagnation there as well as in other things. For instance, the week before last the manager to whose company my father and mother belonged, suddenly closed his doors—put up a playcard with something about 'unavoidable cir-

[illegible]nd then took a wa[illegible] Basing[illegible]l Street."

"And what did he do there?" I asked, quite innocently.

"Went into the Bankruptcy Court," replied Juliet, laughing at my ingenuous simplicity. "But my father and mother will enter upon a new engagement elsewhere next Monday; and I have likewise an engagement at the same place. Our united salaries will amount to twentyfive guineas a week; and thus you see that we may always reckon upon earning sufficient to live in comfort——"

"In luxury, I should say," was my interjected observation——"

"Well, in luxury; if you like to call it so," replied Juliet. "We keep a carriage—you have seen a little how we live—we give gay parties—and we visit a great deal. And then too we have acquaintances amongst the highest aristocracy—I mean of course the male portion of it: but my father and mother are always very particular whom they suffer to approach me, and if they were not, it would be just the same—for I should be particular myself. But really, my dear Ellen, I have been speaking so much of my own affairs that I have quite forgotten yours. You last night told us exactly how you were situated; and after you had gone to bed, I sat up with my father and mother for two hours talking about you."

"It was indeed very kind," I observed; "and I am most grateful for all the interest your parents and yourself are taking in me."

"My father said," continued Juliet, "that it was a very great pity you should think of going out into the world as a governess—to occupy a false position, a little above that of the servants of the house, and infinitely below that of the master and mistress—to be incessantly at the mercy of the lady's caprices, and perhaps exposed to the gentleman's impudence—to have to deal with a parcel of children whose faults you have not sufficient authority to curb, whose love you cannot win, and whose ignorance perhaps you cannot overcome—to be miserably paid and worse treated ——"

"Good heavens, Juliet!" I exclaimed in consternation; "what picture is this which you are drawing?"

"The picture of the life of a governess," answered Miss Norman, with a mournful seriousness. "I am not speaking thus, my dear Ellen, to dishearten and render you wretched on the threshold of a profession which you have thought of adopting, but in the most friendly spirit I am preparing you for all you will have to encounter if you persist in entering it. Nay, more—I will candidly confess that I am endeavouring to dissuade you from it. A young lady with your sensitive feelings with your kind and excellent disposition—would discover the life of a governess to be intolerable!"

"But what am I to do?" I exclaimed, bursting into tears. "Nothing shall induce me to return to my aunt, in order to be a burden upon her resources. No!" I added vehemently, at the same time brushing away those tears; "I will sooner endure anything—encounter my wretchedness—"

"Cheer up, my sweet friend," interrupted Juliet, doing her best to console me. "Do you imagine that the profession of a governess is the only one in the world?"

"No," I responded; and then, as I in my artless inexperience surveyed Juliet almost enviously, I added, "No—for I see that you yourself are

pursuing one which is far more happy, lucrative, and agreeable."

"Come," said Miss Norman, "we have talked sufficiently upon the subject this morning. My father's house is your home for as long as you like to render it so; and we shall therefore find plenty of leisure to discuss plans for your future advantage."

"But I ought to do something speedily," I said; "because I must write to my aunt, who will be anxious concerning me——"

"Write by all means," interrupted Juliet; "tell her how you have been treated in respect to the advertisement—but tell her likewise that you have fallen in with friends who are proud and delighted to have you with them. Perhaps, however, it would be just as well if you were not to mention what professions we follow."

"No—I will not mention it, my dear Juliet," I answered: for methought that it was a request that was thus made rather than a recommendation which was given.

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CHAPTER V.

THE THEATRE.

THREE or four days elapsed, during which I remained perfectly undecided as to the course which I should adopt. Mrs. Norman was a good hearted woman, and well meaning, though somewhat frivolous; and when I consulted her she said all sorts of things against the life of a governess. Mr. Norman likewise spoke to me on the subject: he reasoned more lucidly and collectedly—and he certainly advanced a variety of arguments to support all that had been previously told me by his daughter. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. [illegible] at a recommendation that I should seek the stage as a profession: but Juliet dropped several intimations to the effect that I should do well to turn my thoughts in that direction.

It was on a Wednesday evening that I had arrived at the Normans' house; and it was on the following Monday that these worthy people were to enter upon their new engagement. They had to attend the theatre in the middle of the day for the rehearsal: and they proposed that I should accompany them. I must confess that I was longing for this invitation; and I therefore gladly accepted it. I was anxious to see something more of a theatrical life—to look at it closely—to ascertain all that was required of its votaries—and to obtain an insight into its details. I had seen how well the Normans lived: I found them perfectly contented with their lot:—and deeply solicitous of earning my own livelihood, I was already more than half willing to embrace a profession which methought would realize my hopes. Youth is sanguine; and I flattered myself that if I did once adopt the stage I should succeed. I did not however like the idea of becoming a dancer so much as taking the part of a dramatic actress. As for the opinions which the world entertained of the votaries of the art, I had never hard more on the subject than Miss Norman herself had mentioned to me on the occasion already described: and the last impression left upon my mind was that persons who conducted themselves properly and respectably might surmount the general prejudice and stand out in admirable contrast with the disreputable and bad. I had no idea of contaminating influences; and in the innocent confidence of my own pure heart, I believed it to be

young female to [illegible] theatrical sphere without having her own fair without having her own fair fame undeservedly sullied.

I proceeded with Mr. and Mrs. Norman and their daughter to the theatre which was to be the scene of their new engagement; and on arriving there I accompanied Juliet to her own dressing-room. She was to be the principal *danseuse* in the ballet; and therefore she was treated with the utmost consideration and had a dressing room appropriated to her sole use. Her maid was already there, making such arrangements as were suitable to the young lady's ideas of comfort; a cheerful fire was blazing in the grate; and as some time would elapse before her presence was required by the ballet-master, we sat down on a sofa to converse. I turned the discourse entirely upon theatricals and a theatrical existence; and as Juliet now entered into minuter details than she had previously done, I grew more and more seriously inclined to embrace the profession, if in process of time it should be found that I possessed the suitable qualifications.

Mr. and Mrs. Norman went through their parts in the rehearsal; and then they joined us in the dressing-room, where luncheon was served up. This refreshment being partaken of, Mr. Norman retired, and Juliet began dressing to practise in the ballet in which she was to appear in the evening. I had never been in a theatre before, and therefore was until now utterly unacquainted with the costumes that were used upon the stage. I must confess that I was at first shocked when I beheld Juliet arrayed in that gauzy drapery, which, according to my ideas, was scant even to immodesty; but I could not help admiring the beauty of her personal appearance. I went forth with Mrs. Narmin on the stage to witness the hearsal of the ballet; and when I beheld a swarm of young females all apparelled in a similar airy costume I speedily grew accustomed to it, and the first impression it created wore off. The balletmaster made his appearance with his violin, and dancing commenced—and I soon found myself yielding to a sensation of increasing delight at the spectacle which I thus contemplated.

With Juliet's performance I was perfectly ravished: the mingled elegance and grace which characterized all her movements, the fairy lightness of her evolutions, the harmonious accompaniment of the looks with the gestures, attitudes, and steps themselves—all seemed in my estimation to constitute a real talent—a veritable genius. I had hitherto looked upon dancing as a mere recreation, too frivolous to deserve the serious denomination of an accomplishment; but now it appeared in my eyes to be not merely an accomplishment—for Juliet Norman elevated it into the very poetry of art itself. There was one portion in the ballet where she had to dance alone for several minutes, her companions being arrayed in a semi-circle and remaining stationary for time. In this part of the performance Juliet transcended her previous achievements; and even in that rehearsal so great was her triumph over the greatest difficulites of the art, that when she ceased she was greeted by the applause of all present. Her father and mother surveyed her with looks of radiant admiration; and when she rejoined us I congratulated her enthusiastically on her performance.

Every day during that week did I accompany my friends to the rehearsal in the forenoon; and every eve-

ning did I visit the theatre with them. An elderly lady—the widow of an actor of some eminence in his time—gave me a seat in her box, Mrs. Norman having especially recommended me to her care. The more I saw of theatrical life the more I liked it; but my inclination still pointed towards the drama in preference to the ballet. Though the greater portion of my repugnance to the gauzy, scant, and semi-transparent vesture of the ballet-dancers had passed away, yet did I feel a blush mantling upon my cheeks whenever I thought to myself that if I happened to decide upon the ballet I should have to appear in such an apparel before that densely-packed crowd of spectators. On the other hand, when I beheld Mrs. Norman and the other actresses in the drama, appearing in costumes which no one need blush to wear, I was led to rivet my decision on that branch; and I even felt that thereto I could devote myself with a zeal and an enthusiasm which would enable me completely to surmount my natural diffidence, shyness, and timidity. Accordingly, at the end of the week I frankly intimated to Juliet the desire which I entertained.

I observed that her large violet eyes gleamed with satisfaction at this announcement; and she said to me, "I am rejoiced, Ellen, at the resolve you have adopted, because from the very first I felt convinced that the profession of the stage would suit you. Besides, the friendship I had formed for you at school revived the moment we met in London: and I was deeply solicitous that we should continue together. I am confident you will experience success—you will make money—you will grow rich—you will perhaps form some brilliant matrimonial connection——"

"Juliet!" I exclaimed deprecatingly, as my [illegible]; and then a [illegible] smote me, for it seemed as if my cousin Harry were gazing upon me through the vista of distance with the mournfullest expression in those handsome brown eyes of his.

"And why not, my dear Ellen?" asked Juliet, not comprehending wherefore I had thus checked her, or what dreamy idea was uppermost in my mind at the time. "Have not many actresses espoused peers of the realm—"

"Yes, yes, perhaps!" I hastily interjected; "but I am now thinking of other things—"

"Let me tell you, my dear Ellen," proceeded Miss Norman, as if giving audible expression to her own musings, rather than deliberately addressing herself to me—"I am a little more worldly-minded than you are; and as my father and mother have said, why should not their daughter form an alliance of which they may be proud? I know that I am not very bad looking;"—here she glanced at her psyche, for this discourse took place in her bed chamber one morning after breakfast: "I am as thoroughly respectable as a ballet-dancer can be—I know that not even the malignity of scandal has dared breathe upon my name—"

"No doubt, my dear Juliet," I said, "you have many qualifications—"

"And you too, Ellen," rejoined Miss Norman: then, as she attentively surveyed me, the friendly good-hearted girl went on to observe with a kindling admiration in her looks, "And you too have every winning and captivating qualification. You are exquisitely beautiful, Ellen. Never was female head adorned with such a wealth of glossy raven hair!—never did finer nor brighter dark eyes beam with

all [illegible] intelligence of the best disposition and the most accomplished mind! You have delicate features, faultlessly formed: your nose is perfectly straight: your mouth is like that of a Grecian statue—yet Oh! how different with the vivid vermilion upon those lips and the two rows of pearls shining between them!"

"Juliet! my dear Juliet!" I exclaimed, crimson with confusion; "pray do not continue in this manner!"

"And why not?" said my friend: and then she added with an arch smile, "If Miss Percy does not know that she is beautiful, it is high time she should be made aware of the fact. If the mirror be not tell-tale enough, you shall at least hear the truth from the lips of a friend who loves and admires you."

"But I think nothing of personal attractions, Juliet!"

"Don't be foolish, Ellen, every young woman likes to know that she is beautiful. You must not lead me to think that you are a prude—and I *shall* think so unless you permit me to continue my description. Well, then, you have a chin that is softly and delicately rounded——Mine is too large—and I know it—But yours is perfection itself. And then, my dear Ellen, while you are standing there with averted countenance, you know not how gracefully your head is placed upon that snowy neck of yours. It is like the flower upon its stalk!—Ah! you may take another attitude: but it is only to develop fresh graces—fresh beauties!"

"Juliet, Juliet!—I will run behind the curtains—I will leave the room! Do, my dear friend," I continued, pleading earnestly, "desist from the strain! I really do not like flattery—"

"It is no flattery, Ellen," interrupted Juliet; "and I am resolved to finish my portraiture. Well, then, I have before me a figure more exquisitely beautiful than that of any Grecian statue would be if similarly arrayed in modern drapery. You have the most perfect fall of the shoulders—nothing abrupt—the lines flowing as it were with soft continuosness into the arms. Your figure is sylphid, with a sufficiency of Hebe-like fulness and roundness of proportions to redeem it from too great a slenderness, considering that you are tall. A few years hence you will be a superb woman: now you are a graceful and elegant girl."

"And now, Juliet," I exclaimed half-laughing at what I considered to be her foolishness; and half in confusion at the praises she had been lavishing upon me—though I will not attempt to deny that I knew full well they were not altogether undeserved,—"I shall close your mouth with my hand:"—and playfully I executed my threat.

"I have not half done, my dear Ellen," she said, as in a similarly playful mood she caught hold of my wrist and removed my hand; then retaining that hand in her own, she went on to observe, "He is beautiful modelling!—no culpture was ever more exquisite than these fingers! Look at these almond-shaped nails! Oh, Ellen, you must know that you do possess a very beautiful hand. And as for your feet and ancles, I was admiring them the other day; and I thought to myself, if you would only take to the ballet—"

"No, my dear Juliet," I exclaimed: "but I mean to go upon the stage in the drama. And if you do not make haste and dress, so that you may go and speak on my behalf to the manager, I shall beg Mrs. Norman to escort me. There! it is midday: and the carriage will be at the door in a few minute."

The elegant French timepiece on

Juliet's mantel was proclaiming the hour of noon. I hastened off to my own chamber to put on my bonnet and shawl; and in about half-an-hour, Juliet, who had been wasting her time in singing my praises, was ready to set off for the theatre. Her parents accompanied her, as usual: for even if they had no rehearsal to attend, they invariably—or at least one of them—attended their daughter to that sphere whither they would not have her penetrate alone. A new ballet was to be rehearsed on this occasion: the period for practice was prolonged: and when it was over, Mrs. Norman herself volunteered to introduce me to the manager. I had taken off my bonnet and shawl in Juliet's dressingroom when luncheon was served up there as usual: I was about to fetch them, when Mrs. Norman, who had laid aside the same articles of her own apparel, said that it was not necessary.

With a palpitating heart I followed her to a room where the lessee was seated at a table on which were decanters of wine. The walls were covered with pictures of eminent actors and actresses, dancers, and managers: and all the morning newspapers lay scattered about on the floor around the great man. For a great man he assuredly was in that place: and by numbers was he looked up to as the very arbiter of their destinies. He was quite a young man, considering the position which he held; for he was not above two-and-thirty; and though I had seen him before upon the stage during rehearsals, this was the first time I had found myself so near him. This closer view did not make a very favourable impression upon my mind; methought I now perceived a certain self-sufficient and supercilious air which I had not b[illegible] Richards—h[illegible] manager's name. He was clad in a French flowered silk dressing-gown, and wore a velvet cap with a gold tassel—which costume gave him perhaps an additional tinge of rakishness. He was lounging with a sort of fashionable indolence in a large easy chair, and was giving some instructions to his stage-manager, who had the proof of a new play-bill in his hand.

"You know, sir," the stage-manager was saying at the moment, "we shall want a crowd for the arrest-scene in the new piece."

"Well, we have already arranged for it, Mr. Green," responded Mr. Richards: and, then as he consulted a slip of paper containing memoranda he added, "You have five supernumeraries, and that's sufficient. Tell them to make the most of themselves—I mean to spread themselves well out and look like a mob. Nothing like producing good effects, Mrs. Norman!" and the lessee turned towards Juliet's mother with the half-courteous, half-familiar air which he was wont to adopt towards the principal members of his company.

"I beg your pardon for this intrusion, Mr. Richards," said Mrs. Norman: "but I really thought you were disengaged——"

"Always disengaged to you, my dear," madam answered the lessee: "and particularly when you make your appearance in such pleasing company."

His glance was flung towards me as he thus spoke; and the colou mounted to my cheeks,—not because I fancied at the time that the implied compliment savoured too much of flippant flattery—but because my naturally shy disposition rendered me confused and embarras-

[illegible]tice on the pa[illegible]

"Now, my dear Mr. Richards," said Mrs. Norman, cajolingly, "pray be so obliging as to give your attention to Miss Percy for a few minutes. She is an old school-companion of my daughter's, and therefore a friend of mine—a young lady indeed in whom I am much interested—"

"These assurances, my dear madam," interrupted Mr. Richards, "are quite sufficient to induce me to give all my attention to Miss Percy for a whole half hour if it be necessary. I presume that I already understand her object—"

"Precisely so," responded Mrs. Norman. "My young friend has decided upon the stage as her profession—but not the ballet, Mr. Richards—the drama is her choice. She wished to defer to your opinion as to her probable success; and if you report favourably I shall feel truly delighted to give her the requisite lessons."

"I feel highly flattered," remarked the lessee, "that Miss Percy should wish to take my opinion on the point: but really, my dear Mrs. Norman, you yourself might have formed a judgment—Or perhaps you have done so already—"

"No," interrupted Juliet's mother "I was afraid of being too partial. Ah! there is Juliet herself. I shall leave you, my dear, with your young friend for the present.—Mr. Green," added Mrs. Norman, turning towards the stage-manager, "you will permit me to have a word or two with you, if you please."

Juliet had entered at the moment, accompanied by another ballet-dancer: Mrs. Norman retired with Mr. Green the stage-manager. Juliet and her friend had not put off their dancing apparel; add I noticed that the former now carried in her hand a beautiful bouquet of flowers, which at that season of the year must have been reared in a hot-house and purchased at no inconsiderable price in Covent Garden Market. Her companion was named Melissa Harrison; and as I shall have to speak of her hereafter, I may as well take this opportunity of observing that she was a tall elegantly-shaped girl, with a figure of sylphid airiness—a beautiful countenance—but a very delicate appearance, as if her health were not good, and as if the exertions of the ballet were too much for a constitution not naturally strong.

Juliet and Melissa remained in the lessee's room while he proceeded to question me. There was a kind of patronising courtesy in his manner, as if he meant me to understand that while devoting this attention to my business on Mrs. Norman's account, it was a very great favour that he was showing me, and one which I must appreciate. I do not think it necessary to enter into any details relative to my past history. I simply stated that circumstances compelled me to adopt the means of earning my own livelihood, and that I had conceived a fancy for the stage. Mr. Richards took down a volume of plays from a shelf—selected a passage—and requested me to read it to him. For a few moments I was overwhelmed with bashfulness: but Juliet whispered encouraging words in my ear; and Melissa Harrison, likewise accosting me, spoke in the kindest tone, though this was the first time that we had exchanged a syllable together. I could not help noticing that there was something softly sympathizing and gently compassionating in Melissa's looks as her large hazel eyes were fixed upon me; but I thought at the time that she was generously pitying me on

account of my confusion and embarrassment. Summoning all my courage to my aid I commenced reading the passage indicated by Mr. Richards: and as I proceeded I felt my heart warming with the subject. I caught its spirit—the circumstances in which I was placed appeared to fade away from my consciousness—and I rapidly identified myself with all the feelings and emotions of the character who was supposed to be speaking in the drama. It was not until I had concluded that I suddenly awoke as it were from the delusion in which I had been temporarily cradled—or to which, more properly speaking perhaps, I had wrought myself up: and then I was overwhelmed with a still greater confusion than before on receiving the compliments of Mr. Richards and the praises of Juliet and Melissa.

Mrs. Norman re-entered the room at the moment: and casting a glance around upon all our countenances, her own became animated with joy, as she exclaimed, "Ah! I see how it is! My presage was not incorrect! My young friend has proved that she has got the genius—the talent—although perhaps until this hour it may have lain dormant."

"Yes, my dear Mrs. Norman," answered Mr. Richards "Miss Percy has acquitted herself better than any of us could possibly have anticipated. I never saw so good a first attempt. It is really no flattery! My dear madam, the girl *has* the genius—cultivate it, I beg of you—she cannot be in better hands than your own!"

The lessee spoke these last words in a lowered tone to Mrs. Norman as he drew her aside; and though I veritably believe they were not intended for my ears, yet did I catch them; for I was keenly sensitive to every sign, evidence, or demonstration that in

result of the [illegible] had been put, I must confess that I felt as if I had achieved a triumph; new ideas were rapidly germinating in my mind; the ambition to shine and achieve a reputation as a great actress had already begun to inspire me. And yet, mingled with all these feelings was no inconsiderable remnant of that habitual shyness and excessive diffidence which could not be shaken off all in a moment.

"Let me congratulate you, my sweet friend," said Mrs. Norman; and she bestowed upon me a true theatrical embrace, which afforded Mr. Richards an opportunity of paying another compliment, to the effect that there was no doubt he should shortly have the pleasure of seeing us, as two "stars," enacting the same scene before the curtain.

Presently I was alone with Juliet in her dressing-room; and when she had said several kind things to me on the success of the trial to which I had been put, and likewise prophetic of future greatness on my part,—she appeared to sink into a pensive reverie. Lounging back on the sofa, she contemplated with a profound attention that bouquet of choice flowers to which I have already alluded. For some minutes I watched her, wondering what was passing in her mind, and whether it were any source of sadness which rendered her thus pensive. But gradually I observed a smile wreathing her rich red lips, and then expanding over her countenance, until that handsome face became radiant with animation, and a kindred lustre lighted up the depths of her superb blue eyes. All of a sudden she met my wondering gaze; and then a deep blush crimsoned her cheeks, descended to her neck, and suffused itself even over her shoulders. She

[illegible]rt cherished
[illegible]e fancied the expression of her countenance must have just betrayed to my knowledge.

"You understand what is passing in my mind, dear Ellen?" she said, glancing at me for an instant, and then bending her blushing looks over the bouquet which she held in her hand. "Perhaps you will think I am foolish? And I may be so——"

"Foolish for what, Julie?" I asked, with some degree of surprise.

"Foolish that I should attach the value which I do to this bouquet," she continued, still keeping her eyes upon it—"or at least that I should attribute a certain significancy to it. Ah! I see that you do *not* understand me!" she exclaimed, now raising her fine blue eyes towards my countenance, but still with a blush glowing upon her cheeks.

"No; I do not understand you, Julie," I answered—"unless indeed it be that this beautiful nosegay is a tribute of admiration paid by someone——"

"Did you just now observe that tall slender young man," asked Miss Norman, slowly and hesitatingly, "who was in the lessee's box during rehearsal?"

"I noticed several gentlemen in the boxes——"

"Well, the particular one to whom I allude is Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe. He is the son of the Earl of Carshalton—he is only just come of age——It is he, Ellen, who sent me this beautiful bouquet. It was placed in my hands a few minutes before I entered the lessee's room to look after you."

"And therefore you think," I said, with the utmost ingenuousness, "that Lord Frederick Ravanscliffe is in love with you?"

Juliet Norman gave no immediate answer: but she again bent her blushing countenance over the bouquet. I now remembered that while standing on side of the stage to witness the rehearsal of the ballet, I noticed in a box on the opposite side a young gentleman whose personal appearance corresponded with the description Miss Norman had just given. I recollected likewise the conversation that took place between herself and me the morning after my introduction to her parents' abode and I said, "You know, Julie, it has been your ambition to form a good matrimonial alliance some day or another. Who can tell but that your wish may be realized even more speedily than you had anticipated? I *did* remark that young nobleman——"

"And is he not very handsome?" asked Miss Norman in an under-tone, as if afraid that the very walls might have ears to catch the words from her lips: then, without waiting for my reply, she went on to say, "I have seen him on each occasion at rehearsals—and always of an evening likewise. I don't know how it was, but my heart whispered something to me—yes, something to the effect that it was on *me* principally—on *me only* his looks were fixed; and now I have received; proof of it:"—and again her eyes were fixed upon the bouquet.

Her maid at this moment entered to announce that the carriage was in waiting: the conversation was thus cut short—we rejoined Mr. and Mrs. Norman—and all returned home together.

I had written to my aunt Mrs. Wakefield to inform her that the pretended letter of Mrs. Lennie was a cruel deception, but that I had fortunately found an asylum with very kind friends. I now sat down for the purpose of penning another

letter, to explain my intention of embracing the stage as a profession: but scarcely had I made a beginning, when it struck me that I had been too precipitate and that I ought not to resolve upon anything until I had consulted Mrs. Wakefield and received her council and assent. I knew not therefore how to word the letter which I desired to write. I thought that I would postpone the task until the morrow, during which interval I might have leisure for reflection.

In the evening I went to the theatre as usual; and when I beheld the applause which greeted the principal actresses—when I repeated over and again to myself the encouraging words which Mr. Richards had spoken aside to Mr. Norman in the forenoon, and which my ear had caught—a thrill of unknown pleasure passed through me: I felt as if I had already achieved greatness and created renown for my self. I was enraptured with the profession; and I found myself inwardly resolving that nothing should deter me from adopting it. I beheld Juliet's brilliant triumph in the ballet; and when flowers were showered down upon her from the nearest boxes, I noticed that the finest bouquet was thrown by the hand of Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe. Again my heart thrilled with the ideas that swept through my brain; for I fancied to myself that if the day should come when I might be standing on that same stage, invested with all the glories of triumph, the hand of one of whom I often thought might possibly bestow a choice bouquet upon me, and the handsome brown eyes of my cousin might shed upon me the light of joyous congratulations.

On the following morning I received a letter from my aunt, conveying a piece of intelligence of no small impo[illegible] to her son. By some means, which I need not pause to describe, he had attracted the notice of a manufacture residing at Paisley but who had been staying for a few days at Sheffield; and this gentleman had offered Henry a situation as a clerk in his establishment, with an immediate salary of sixty pounds a year, and the promise of a speedy augmentation if he conducted himself well. He was to enter without delay upon his duties; and Mrs. Wakefield intended to remove to Paisley in order that her son might still have the advantage of the maternal home. In reference to myself the letter contained the following paragraphs:—"I admire you spirit, my dear Ellen, and I love you for that good feeling towards myself which prompted you to seek the bread of independence. I rejoice that you have found kind friends who are so generously giving you a home until you can launch yourself in the world. Having the fullest confidence in your excellent principles, and also in the counsel which those friends are enabled to give you, I do not needlessly proffer advice. But remember, my dear girl, that there, is always a home for you beneath my roof, wherever my own habitation may be."

The letter contained one from my cousin Harry, who were in the highest spirits on account of having at last procured a situation which would prevent him from continuing a burden on his mother's slender resources. He expressed many hopes on behalf of my welfare and happiness and declared that the only drawback to his own complete contentment was that we were separated. "You know, my dear Ellen," he said, in this kind letter, "that I would cheerfully toil for you as well as for myself; but my mother insist

that [illegible] you to follow the present bent of your own persevering spirit and industrious inclinations: and therefore I urge nothing further upon that point. As for myself, I mean to try to get on so well that you shall some day have reason to be proud of your cousin Harry."

This last sentence gave a particular impulse to my thoughts; and turned them into a somewhat new channel.

"And I also will endeavour," I said within myself, "to win that position which shall some day render you Henry, proud of your cousin Ellen! What," I went on musing in the enthusiasm of my feelings,—"what if I were to prepare a great surprise for those relatives who are interested in me? what if I were to keep my secret relative to the profession in which I am about to embark? Through the kindness of these excellent friends I have a home assured me: and I may accept it, because I feel—I know—I have that within my heart which tells me that the day will come when I shall be enabled to repay them for all their goodness. Oh, what joy, what happiness if at no very distant time I shall find myself in a position to write to my aunt and cousin and tell them that I have achieved success and that gold is pouring in upon me!"

My enthusiasm was as exalted in the exact proportion as my inexperience of the world was great: my hopes were as ardent as my soul itself was ingenuous. My resolve was taken accordingly, I wrote to my aunt and cousin congratulating them upon the good intelligence their own letters had conveyed to me, and informing them that my friends the Normans had made up their minds not to part with me for the present, and that they kindly opened to my view certain means and prospects which would relieve me from the idea of being an useless and dependent burden upon their bounty. In this letter I did not study any hypocritical evasion nor culpable dissimulation: my objects were well-meant—my aim was straightforward and honourable; and I did not for a moment imagine that I was guilty of any real impropriety in veiling my ultimate intentions from the knowledge of those relatives who were deeply interested in my welfare.

CHAPTER VI.

EDWIN ST. CLAIR.

I CONTINUED to attend regularly the rehearsals at the theatre: not that I myself as yet practised in them, but in order to obtain as much insight as possible into the details of the profession which I was about to enter. When at home,—as I may denominate the house of my kind friends,—Mr. and Mrs. Norman gave me lessons, taking it by turns, and experiencing a pleasure in thus instructing me.

Thus several weeks went by; and during this period I formed many new acquaintances; for the Normans saw as much company as their avocations would permit. There were frequent supper-parties when the evening engagements at the theatre were over: they likewise received friends to breakfast and to luncheon. I was thus introduced to some of the most eminent *artistes* of the day; but beyond the dramatic sphere the Normans had also numerous friends. As Juliet had given me to understand, there were amongst these visitors several male scions of the aristocracy; and, as my experi-

ences became enlarged, I perceived that I was the object of much attention on the part of the noblemen and gentlemen frequenting the house as well as those who had permission to attend the rehearsals at the theatre. Mrs. Norman however kept her eye as much upon me as upon her own daughter; and I myself maintained a demeanour that was becomingly courteous to those flatterers; but I never gave them the slightest encouragement. Indeed, in this respect I was much more shy and reserved than Juliet; for she would laugh and joke, and even slightly flirt sometimes, with some of these fashionable hangers-on: whereas I never put myself forward—I was glad when I could shrink timidly into the background—though when compelled to join in conversation, I assuredly did not study to render myself disagreeable.

Meanwhile Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe had procured an introduction to the Normans: and he received invitations to their house. He became marked in his attentions towards Juliet; and she confessed to me that she was considerably enamoured of him. He sent handsome presents of game, venison, turtle, and fish to Mr. Norman—boxes of eau de Cologne and French gloves to Mr. Norman—but to Juliet naught beyond the choicest bouquets from Covent Garden Market.

One evening, when invited to supper, Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe brought with him a gentleman named St. Clair. He was about four-and-twenty years of age and remarkably handsome. His hair was a light brown, with perhaps a tinge of auburn in it, shining with a rich gloss and curling naturally. It was parted above a high and noble forehead, where the grandest intellect seemed to sit enthroned; and the fine large [illegible] faithful in the [illegible] the mind's light. Nothing could be more perfect than the Grecian profile of Edwin St. Clair. He had been for two or three years in the Horse Guards, until an uncle's death—which happened suddenly—put him in possession of a princely fortune; and then he had retired from the army. But he still bore the title of captain—by courtesy, I presume: and he had not discarded the moustache which he had worn in the service. This moustache shaded without concealing the short upper lip, which had a somewhat haughty expression: his teeth were pure, even, and faultless as those of the most lovely woman. A little above the middle height, his figure was the perfection of masculine symmetry; and when the terms "elegance" and "grace" are applied to the appearance, the bearing, and the gait of persons of the male sex, they never could be more justly used than in reference to Edwin St. Clair.

A few weeks before he was thus introduced to the Norman family he had entered Parliament; and he had already made three or four speeches which had perfectly electrified the house. His voice was rich-toned—full of that masculine harmony which when low seems to sing dream-like into the souls of the listeners—but which, when swelling with the enthusiasm of the feelings and with the passion of eloquence, has the effect of a grand and sublime choral music. His countenance was pale: there were times when it was pensive, but not saddened: it seemed the mere habit of thought inseparable from a high order of the intellect. There was other times when that countenance, though seldom flushing with the warm blood's glow, was never

the[illegible] radiance, —as a [illegible] pours upon the face of statuary marble the effulgence which is only just perceptibly tinged with hue of the embowering roses amidst which the light has passed. But there were times likewise when a strange smile would for a few instants waver upon St. Clair's lips, and when the eyes would have a kindred peculiarity of look. The first time I ever caught this expression of his countenance, I fancied there was something sinister in it—something which ought not to appear upon a face in its sublime masculine beauty should only reflect the loftiest and most ennobling thoughts. I could not understand what that expression of the countenance meant; and yet it was so transient, and was so instantaneously succeeded by the more natural and agreeable look, that when it had passed away, it left me in a sort of dreamy bewilderment as to whether it had ever for that brief space existed at all. Was it a contempt for the surrounding gaities and frivolities of society?—was it a cynical distaste for pleasures which other people prized?—or was it the involuntary expression of proud scorn on the part of a lofty mind for all the inferior intellects with which it came in contact? I knew not: I could form no conjecture upon the subject; and yet it was an expression of countenance which left an uneasy impression on the beholder at the time, and haunted the memory afterwards.

I have already said that Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe introduced Captain St. Clair to the house in Hunter Street, Brunswick Square. He then became a frequent visitor for the next few weeks; and I could not blind myself to the fact that while St. Clair treated everyone else with the courteous attention which his exquisitely-polished manners could so well display, towards me he was reserved and distant. He never addressed a single syllable of his conversation to me, unless he was compelled by the intercourses of the table; and even then his look was half averted as if in disdain at the bare idea of having to notice so humble an individual. Occasionally—if any warm arguments were in progress upon a particular subject, and when St. Clair had listened with the most urbane attention to the remarks of others—the moment my opinion was referred to by the friendship or the courtesy of any one present, the topic appeared all in an instant to lose its interest for St. Clair: he became cold and reserved—yet not in respect to the whole company around him,—but all this coldness and all this reserve seemed suddenly to be concentrated and directed towards myself.

Mr. and Mrs. Norman, Juliet, and Melisa Harrison (who was a frequent guest at the house) began to notice Edwin St. Clair's conduct in respect to myself; and they questioned me on the point. They asked me if I had ever known him before—whether I had given him cause for a demeanour which amounted at times to absolute rudeness—whether he had made some overture which I had resented, and for the resenting of which he was thus treating me with a spiteful vindictiveness? To all these queries I answered in the negative—and truly answered. My pride was however piqued; and I professed to have been in observant of that behaviour which was the subject of these interrogatories. Inwardly I felt annoyed at St. Clair's conduct. Totally unconscious of having given him offence, I did not like to be marked out for such undeserved punishment. Instead of being any longer

pleased to be thus thrown into the background, my soul was getting chafed at what I could not but regard as a sort of cold-blooded, cowardly, and tacit persecution. I saw that St. Clair was popular with all who belonged to the sphere of his acquaintance:—without either assumption, self-sufficiency, or obtrusiveness, he became the star of every circle. The brilliancy of his intellect, the equisite polish of his manners, the fascination of his discourse, as well as a certain tact which he had of rendering himself agreeable to whomsoever he thought it worth while to please,—all these qualifications were the source of the power that he weilded. To be absolutely ignored, therefore—to be scorned or to be "cut" by such a man as this, was something only too well calculated to gall the feelings of even so patient, beautiful, and retiring a creature as myself.

One day I was attending the rehearsal as usual, and was standing with Mr. and Mrs. Norman quite at the back of the stage, witnessing the Terpsichorean displays of Juliet and four other dancers who were practising a portion of a new ballet. Mr. and Mrs. Norman had their eyes riveted with the most justifiable admiration upon their tall, handsome, exquisitely-made daughter, as she was most rapturously poetising, so to speak, that art in which she excelled. She was, as usual, putting forth all her efforts, though without any visible strain, to that effect,—because Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe was in a stage-box, contemplating her with looks full of love and admiration. As I happened to glance around, I perceived Edwin St. Clair seated at the side of the stage, and apparently gazing with fix looks on the dancers I had not seen him enter—I knew not how lo[illegible] and the mon[illegible] upon him I averted my countenance, for fear he should notice that I glanced towards him and should think that I was anything more than utterly indifferent as to his presence. That portion of the rehearsing ballet was speedily finished: there was a pause on the part of the dancers: Mr. and Mrs. Norman advanced towards their daughter to say something to her. I remained alone on the spot where they had left me, when a well-known voice came stealing as it were upon my ear in the soft richness of its harmony; and I gave an involuntary start.

"Your friend Miss Norman is a most accomplished *danseuse*, Miss Percy," said St. Clair, who, totally unperceived by me, had passed round from his seat in such a way that he came upon me from behind.

"Yes, Captain St. Clair," I answered coldly; "my friend Miss Norman has achieved perfection."

I was then about to move away, when it instantaneously struck me that if I did so my conduct would have the air of a studied resentment on account of his own behaviour towards me; and, my pride coming to my relief—or rather to my guidance—would not permit me to afford this indication that he had ever succeeded in annoying me.

"Yes, Miss Norman is an accomplished *artiste*," continued St. Clair, lounging with an elegant air of fashionable indolence against a piece of scenery. "You, Miss Percy, are intended for the stage, I believe? When do you think of making you *debut*?"

"Nothing is as yet positively settled on that point, Captain St. Clair," I answered, with what I may flatter myself was a lady-like coldness and reserve.

u are so uncer[illegible]," he remarked.

I gave no reply: and there was a silence of nearly a minute.

"Yes—I am sorry," continued St. Clair—and methought that there was a slight tincture of vexation in his tone, as if he had expected that his previous observation would lead to a question on my part, and that he was annoyed that it had not: "yes, I am sorry, because my own engagements will compel me to leave London shortly for a few weeks; and I had promised myself the pleasure of being present at your *debut*."

I was amazed at this speech: indeed it so took me by surprise that I had not sufficient control over myself to prevent the betrayal of that wonderment in my looks. St. Clair glanced at me for an instant; and then bending his eyes downward as if contemplating his polished foot—though there was really no tidge of foppery in his composition—he said, "it is not always those with whom laughs the loudest and to whom one assumes the gayest demeanour, that one feels the most interest in. Doubtless, Miss Percy, you have thought my conduct towards you exceedingly strange?"

He looked up suddenly in my face as he thus spoke; and as the effect of the first surprise had not worn off it now received another impulse. It was astonishment succeeding astonishment.

"Perhaps you have deemed my behaviour more than extraordinary" continued Edwin St. Clair: "you may have regarded it as rude, unwarrantable — even cruel and cowardly—especially, Miss Percy," he added in the softest tones of his harmonious voice, "as I have been told that you are an orphan—that you have no other friends in the world than those whom your own goodness has made for you—that you are amiable, kind, and of an excellent disposition."

St. Clair had the art of throwing the most melting pathos into his language when he chose; and he was doing it now. There was something so irresistibly touching in the manner in which he had lowered his voice so that its cadence might suit the words "you are an orphan," that my suddenly-excited emotions swelled up into my every throat and tears gushed from my eyes.

"A thousand pardons, Miss Percy," said St. Clair, with earnestness in his tone and his look,—"a thousand pardons," he repeated, "that I should have made you weep! I would not have done it for worlds! For heaven's sake dry those tears! Those who have already seen with what marked and studied coldness I have treated you will think that I am now bringing my cowardly conduct to a crisis, and that I am heaping the last crowning insult upon you."

I did wipe away my tears; and I made a movement to leave the spot where this singular discourse was taking place—quite at the back of the stage and in the shade of some scenery. But Captain St. Clair, without absolutely detaining me, just touched my arm gently with his gloved hand for an instant—and said, "Remain Miss Percy. You have borne all my seeming cold cruelty towards you: you must now listen to the explanation and the cause."

I felt as if under some spell-like influence, and I became riveted to the spot. There was a kind of fascinating power investing this man: the simplest assertion of his will, however delicately conveyed, appeared to be sufficient to ensure obedience on the part of all who

came in contact with him. I longed to go—and yet I could not. Perhaps he felt his own power, and at that instant triumphed in it; for I caught that peculiar sinister expression flitting over his countenance. The next instant it was gone; and in the most harmonious tones of his penetrating voice, he proceeded to address me in the following manner:—

"You must bear with me, Miss Percy, somewhat—because I am a being different from the rest of the world. I am to be judged by the rule of contraries. When I seem gayest I am really saddest; and when I appear pensive, my imagination may in reality be revelling in the paradise which its own power conjectures up. In the same way when my attention may seem to be most closely fixed upon a subject, my thoughts are as far away thence as the poles are asunder: and when I appear not to be listening, I am in reality all attention. Those whom I hate, scorn, or despise, I invariably overwhelm with my affabilities:—even to those towards whom I am supremely indifferent, I am full of blandishments. But where I conceive a friendship—where I take a liking—it is *there* that the perversities, the contradictions, and the inconsistencies of my character most display themselves for *there* it is that I seem coldest when my heart is warmest—*there* it is that my demeanour is of ice while my soul inwardly is in a glow—*there* it is that I can offer insult or outrage though all the while I would go to the ends of the earth to render a service! Do you comprehend such a disposition as this, Miss Percy?"

"It is replete with dissimulations, I answered; "and he who can give such a character of himself, would be equally capable of inventing a whole tissue of such inconsistencies for the mere purpose of gaining a reputation fo[illegible]al-city—I scarcely [illegible] w[illegible] term it."

"Your language is severe," replied Edwin St. Clair "but by heaven! there is no studied dissimulation with me. You may perhaps say it is a dissimulation to have the appearance of hating where one really likes; but this be a portion of my character—an evidence of in weakness or its strength, whichever you please—assuredly is not an hypocrisy: for it is natural. Though peculiar in its nature, it is not assumed. And now, will you permit me to add one word more?" continued St. Clair, bending his looks most earnestly upon my countenance "You, Miss Percy, have been rendered the victim of those peculiarities on my part:—and would you know the cause? It is that the more cold-bloodedly ferocious my conduct may have appeared towards you, so has my real feeling been proportionately the stronger;—it is Miss Percy, that I love you!"

The reader may perhaps deem it stranger when I assert that this declaration came quite unexpectedly upon me; for the last few minutes been flowing in that direction, yet did it appear so full of sophistry, or at least mystic inconsistency, as to leave me unable to conjecture what aim it might reach. Besides, I was too innocent and inexperienced to anticipate avowals of love; and if perhaps any idea at all had been floating in my mind as to the end towards which St. Clair was aiming, it was that a proffer of his friendship might perhaps be made. Therefore I was confounded when that declaration was breathed from his lips: and then I must candidly confess there was a glow of pride in my heart at the thought that the man whose coldness had chafed me, and who had made me as it were the victim

of [illegible]serve in the presence of others, was all along the slave of a passion with which I had inspired him. Yet it was not altogether possible to analyze my thoughts and feelings at the time inasmuch as for some minutes they were bewildered and confused,—so much so that he had taken my hand, he retained it in his own, and I the while unconscious thereof.

"Yes, Miss Percy, it is true," he continued, with all the melodious persuasiveness of that magically-musical voice of his,—"it is true that I love you——"

I now hastily withdrew my hand: indeed I snatched it abruptly away the very moment I was wakened to the sense that it was being pressed in his own.

"Do not think that I mean to insult you," proceeded St. Clair, whose countenance for an instant had expressed a haughty anger, and had then, almost in the twinkling of an eye, reassumed the tender eloquence of its look. "I am not addressing you in that language wherein young men so often speak to young ladies within these walls—and which, if breathed behind the scenes, is as false and insincere as if spoken by those who are playing a part before the curtain. No; it is the language of truthfulness that I am speaking! You have inspired me with a feeling which never, never have I known before;—and I who have been so proud, in my very cynicism, have become your slave! Will you take my name and share my fortune? I vow to heaven that I am sincere in the proposal!"

I have already said that there was something almost irresistibly fascinating about Edwin St. Clair: I knew likewise that he was immensely rich; and he was remarkably handsome. Can it be wondered if I listened without interrupting him? will the reader marvel if I confess that I was dazzled by the brilliancy of this offer? There was moreover in the entire proceeding a tincture of romance full well calculated to have its weight and influence with the mind of an artless, inexperienced girl. There was the man whose coldness had hiterto chafed me, now offering to make me his bride!—there was the "observed of all observers," the centre of every circle, the promising young statesman, the brilliant St. Clair,—there was he ready to sink at my feet: I felt the colour coming and going rapidly upon my cheeks: my heart was palpitating violently—and I could give no response.

"With sincerity has the proposal been made," continued St. Clair: "and with honour shall it be carried out. But your decision must be given at once; and if it be in the affirmative, the present moment is the last time you must be seen in *this* part of the theatre. I will deal frankly with you, Ellen. If you had ever appeared publicly upon the stage I would not offer to make you my bride: I could not marry an actress. But as it is—No matter!—It is different! And now your decision?"

My brain was so confused as if an illuminated mist was surrounding me—a mist which alike dazzled and bewildered. But gradually through that golden fog—through that dense illuminated mist—the eyes of *another* appeared to be looking in upon me. They were not the eyes that sometimes flashed with a sinister light: but they were the dark brown eyes which had never shed a beam to startle my soul nor to leave a disagreeable impression on it. The revulsion which took place in my feelings was prompt and signal: my brain recovered its clearness—my thoughts grew collected: I was the

complete mistress of my actions:—the spell was lifted from off my mind.

"Captain St. Clair," I said, mildly but firmly, "I thank you for the honour which you have done me and for the favour with which you have regarded me. But I beg most respectfully to decline your proposal."

Never shall I forget the expression which suddenly swept over St. Clair's countenance. I have read in old romances how the Enemy of Mankind has put on the human shape in all its most beauteous aspect—and how the sudden utterance as some holy name has in a moment called up the withering look of the fallon angel. So was it with St. Clair. A hidden fiend appeared for the instant to look out of his eyes; the very beauty of his countenance was for that brief moment fearful to contemplate. I was startled—I was shocked—I was terrified. The conviction seemed to flash in unto my mind that I had suddenly made a mortal enemy of one who was mighty to do much either of good or of evil, but all whose power of mischief would henceforth be brought to bear upon myself. Yet quick as lightning that terrible—that ominous look had swept away from his countenance; and I was transfixed with surprise on beholding how calmly sad, how reproachfully mournful it now appeared. Could that former expression—so transient, so fleeting,—could it have been naught but imagination on my part? was it nothing but a moment's dream?

"Miss Percy," said Edwin St. Clair, with a soft melancholy intonation, "your decision has been given—and perhaps it is irrevocable. I do not complain; you have a right to study your own happiness, although it may be to the destruction of mine [illegible] regard me as a [illegible], and henceforth we shall be friends. One thing I would beseech —— which is that the seal of invoilable silence may remain upon your lips in respect to all that has now taken place between us."

With the same mild firmness as before, I gave Captain St. Clair the assurance which he desired; and I hastened away to rejoin my friends. All the persons gathered upon the stage were conversing in groups; and thus the episode which I have been relating in respect to myself, had passed without any very particular notice. At all events its nature remained unsuspected.

About ten days elapsed after this occurrence; and not for a single instant did I regret the decision at which I had arrived. St. Clair called every day in Hunter Street,—either in the afternoon when the rehearsals were over, or else in the evening supper time; and his bearing towards myself was that of the most friendly courtesy. The Normans and Melissa Harrison noticed this change in his demeanour: and in a good-humoured manner they remarked to me that the amiability of my own disposition had thawed the cold reserve which through caprice (as they fancied it to be) he had originally maintained towards me. Not another syllable on the one subject did St. Clair breathe in my ears: nor even by a look did he appear to initimate that his thoughts still dwelt thereon.

As the time was now approaching when Mr. and Mrs. Norman fancied I might make my *debut*,—they having purposely delayed it in order that I should prove as proficient as possible,—I selected the part in which I desired to appear. I no longer attended the theatre in the

day [illegible]ned at the house to study that part. One day Melissa Harrison called, and found me alone. She herself had obtained a few days' leave of absence through indisposition: for, as I have already said, she was of a sickly constitution. I told her that I was studying my part; and I spoke with an enthusiasm which made her contemplate me with the deepest attention. Gradually methought an expression of sadness infused itself into her looks,—a sadness which had likewise something in it: and then I recollected that she had gazed on me in a similar manner when Mr. Richards, the lessee, spoke so favourably of my dramatic genius. I had taken a liking to Miss Harrison; and we had grown initimate together.

"Tell me, Melissa," I said,—"who do you look at me thus? It is not the first time——"

"Oh, it is nothing!" she exclaimed: and then with a laugh of forced gaiety, she strove to turn the discourse into another channel.

"There is something in your mind, Melissa," I said. "I beseech you to tell me what it is. Does it concern yourself? If so—and if it be anything to annoy you—you will have my sincerest sympathy. But if it regard me—as I am almost inclined to fancy that it must, from the way in which you have gazed upon me——"

"Would you have me speak out?" exclaimed Miss Harrison suddenly. "Oh, do not force me, Ellen!—or perhaps I shall destroy some of those golden dreams in which you have been cradling yourself."

"Good heavens, what mean you?" I asked suddenly frightened by the words as well as by the look which accompanied them. "Leave me not in suspense! I appeal to your friendship—if there be anything that I ought to know, for heaven's sake tell it to me!"

"My dear Ellen," she continued, "I should have spoken to you at first upon this very subject, had I not reflected that I had no right to take upon myself that duty which the Normans had failed to perform. You have been led to look on the bright side of the theatrical world; and no one has as yet undertaken to show you the dark side. Conceive yourself seated in the boxes, and contemplating the stage when it is bathed in the effulgence of the gaslights. What is more beautiful than the scenery? what more superb or more dazzling than the vesture of the performers? what more lovely than the countenances of the fairy-like girls who are fitting hither and thither upon those boards? But when viewed close, and when the eyes escape from the delusion with which glare and distance invest all these,—how different are they? The scenery is a vile daub—the dresses are the veriest tinsel—careworn and haggard looks are concealed by paint and cosmetics."

"All this I know full well, Melissa," I said. "But there is no harm in those delusions of glare and distance which produce the effects without which the theatre would lose all its charms."

"Oh, Ellen; is it possible," exclaimed Melissa, "that you do not comprehend the moral which my words would convey? I tell you that you have looked upon the bright side, and not upon the other! You know not the miseries, the anxieties, which held to make up the sum of a theatrical existence. Those who are successful are devoured by a thousand petty jealousies. Even Mr. and Mrs. Norman—good easy people though they be, and too fond of the pleasures of this life to meet

annoyances halfway, much less to create vexations for themselves,—even *they* have their troubles of this description. It has not happened so since you have known them: but perhaps it is the only period in their lives that they have been thus contented. As for those who are *unsuccessful*—good heavens! what a life! When engaged, they feel that they are only tolerated—and they are made to drink deep of the bitter cup of humiliations. But when without engagements—*then* what misery, what privation, what distress become their portion! I have seen it, Ellen—aye, and I have felt it too!" added Melissa, a strong shudder sweeping through her form at the bare recollection.

"Good heavens, you have felt it?" I exclaimed, the tears starting into my eyes. "But you are successful you are well paid—"

"Yes—success came," she responded, with a singularly wild bitterness in her look and tone,—"success came when it was too late in one sense—almost too late in another—"

"How too late, Melissa?" I asked wonderingly. "That *first* sense of which you spoke—"

"No matter!" she interjected with an almost startling abruptness. "I was crushed down by the weight of penury *then*—an orphan—friendless—on the very point of being houseless—I was starving—But no matter! In that *other* sense to which I alluded, I say that success came almost too late; because the heart was too sick to enjoy it—and because the soul had sunk down so wingweary upon the earth that though it might be partially lifted up, it would never soar again in those lofty flights to which in the fervour of youthful hope and in buoyant imagination it had once risen!"

There was a strange bitterness in the first por[illegible] and a deep [illegible]ne latter, which bo[illegible]ke di[illegible] harm to observe; but as I could only partially fathom the meaning, I gazed upon her in mingled surprise, curiosity, and compassion.

"No," she continued, "you have comprehended nothing of the dark side of this existense upon which you are about to enter. You have not thought of all the temptations which environ the young female embarking in his career. Oh, my dear Ellen, when I saw you in the purity of your soul and the innocene of your heart, abandoning yourself to the enthusiasm of hope—when on the day of your first test in the lessee's room, I beheld your countenance flushing with joy as your ears caught the pressages of success—I pitied you—yes, I pitied you!—for methought that one so beautiful, so artless, and so confiding should have been destined for better things!"

"Good heavens, Melissa!" I exclaimed in affright—and I felt that I grew deadly pale,—"what is all this that you are telling me? Do you mean that Mr. and Mrs. Norman have decieved me—that Juliet also has deceived me—"

"No, no—my dear friend!—they have not deceived you! They have told you nothing that is untrue—though they have abstained from telling you *all* the truth. But blame them not! Mr. and Mrs. Norman will say nothing against the profession by which they live, and which they cannot possibly renounce. It is the business of their lives to persuade themselves that they are happy in their profession: they will would not even to one another, in the intimacy of man and wife, admit that they sometimes secretly wish their lot had been cast in a different sphere. As for Juliet,

sh[illegible]ssful—she has [illegible]e incense of adulation surrounds her; and everything is as yet of a roseate hue to her contemplation. She dreams of a brilliant alliance——"

"And with some reason too," I observed, glad of the opportunity to catch any argument which would serve as a refutation of Melisa's gloomy reasoning: "for is not Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe paying his court to her?"

"Ellen, it is incredible," exclaimed Melissa, with a fierce and bitter scorn in her looks, "how every girl upon the stage with any pretensions to beauty—and even with none—fancies that she will marry a nobleman! Because there have been a few isolated instances of such espousals—"

"But do you not think," I interrupted Miss Harrison, "that Lord Frederick will marry Juliet?"

"I hope so!" answered Melissa drily; "because Juliet expects it, and she is deeply enamoured of him. But for weeks and weeks he has been hanging about her; and yet the word is not spoken—the matrimonial offer is not yet made! Heaven grant that Juliet's passion has not been fanned to an extent that may lead her reason astray: for I am fond of her—she has many noble traits—and it would grieve me sadly if she came to harm."

"Do you think it possible," I asked, almost indignantly, "that Juliet Norman would forget what is due to herself—what is due to her parents—her sense of propriety—"

"Not willingly—not deliberately, Ellen," responded Melissa. "But infatuation is dangerous—there are moments of weakness—"

Here Miss Harrison suddenly averted her countenance as she stopped short; and for a few moments I felt so pained by her language—so hurt on Juliet's account—that I made no attempts to continue the conversation. I sat perfectly still, with my eyes bent down: it was almost a feeling of anger which I experienced against Melissa. All of a sudden a sound like that of a sob came upon my ear. I started—I bent forward—I looked round in Melissa's countenance: she was weeping bitterly. Forgotten in an instant was the little resentment with which she had inspired me; and throwing my arms about her neck, I exclaimed "Good heavens! I have appeared unkind towards you—I looked or spoke angrily—you meant no harm—Forgive me, dear Melissa! or perhaps there is some other cause—perhaps these tears have another source—"

"Let us say no more upon the subject, Ellen" interrupted Miss Harrison. "Perhaps there has been too much said already. Yet I hope you know me too well to think that I could either seek unkindly to damp your enthusiasm, on the one hand, in respect to the career on which you are about to enter—or on the other hand to disparage the good principles of our mutual friend Juliet. In reference to yourself, I thought it would only be performing a friend's part to warn you of the snares and perils which beset a young girl when entering the theatrical sphere. And you, Ellen, are so sweetly beautiful—so good—so kind-hearted—Oh! for heaven's sake look well at every step you take in this tangled maze wherein you are plunging! And now not another word on the subject—at least not for to-day! And you will not tell the Normans that I have dealt thus candidly with you? They look upon you as a star whom they are introducing into the dramatic heaven, and whose light will therefore to a certain extent be reflected on themselves. They would not thank

me if they knew I had breathed a single syllable which might have the effect of abating your enthusiasm. And now, my sweet friend, farewell!"

With these words Melissa Harrison grasped my hand and hurried from the room. Her discourse had left a painful impression on my mind: indeed the entire scene was such that I could not possibly put it away from my thoughts, nor avoid dwelling on it with a certain mingling of positive uneasiness and vague apprehension.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE INVITATION AND THE RESULT.

On the day after the preceding conversation, I had occasion to make some purchases, and I walked forth alone for the purpose. It was a little before the hour of noon; and I had to go in the direction of the West End to procure the articles which I required. As I was turning the corner of a street leading into one of the fashionable squares, I had to stop suddenly short on account of a splendid equipage that was dashing along from the opposite direction. It was an open phaeton drawn by two superb horses, whose harness was literally covered with silver: the coachman and footman were clad in gorgeous liveries—light blue coats covered with silver lace, broad bands and cords to their hats, red plush breeches, and shoes with buckles. The body of the phaeton had but one occupant—a gentleman, who was lounging back with the air of one who superciliously despised all the foot-passengers by whom his equipage dashed. A glance at that individual's [illegible] me that it was Mr. [illegible]rks the lawyer.

The recognition was mutual: he ordered the equipage to stop; and taking me by the hand, exclaimed, "Well really, Ellen, this is most extraordinary! I was on my way to call upon you. I only came back from the Continent a few days ago ——But why did you not leave your address at my house, so that when I did come back I might see you?"

"In the first place, Mr. Parks," I answered, "I did not think that I had sufficient claims upon your interest; and in the second place, I have been staying with friends—I am not in a situation as a governess, as perhaps you might have fancied ——"

"Why should you suppose that you are not an object of interest to me?" he cried. "Have I not known you from your childhood? But I suppose it was because I wrote that letter of mine in such a dreadful hurry, you might have fancied it a cool one—I mean when you applied to me a few months ago about your idea of going into the world as a governess——"

"Well, Mr. Parks," I answered, "I certainly thought there was an absence of friendliness in your letter: but since you assure me it was merely the effect of haste, I am sorry I should have put so uncharitable a construction on it. And now therefore, permit me to express my thanks for the advertisements which you inserted——"

"No thanks are needful, my dear Ellen," replied the lawyer. "I am prepared to do anything for you—— and perhaps I have neglected you somewhat. However, now that we have met, you must permit me to show you some little attention. I have a great many things to talk to you about. You will come and dine with me to-day: Mrs. Parks

wil[illegible]e you—we have often thought and spoken of you since my poor mother's death. Ah, she was a saint, Ellen!—and she is now an angel in heaven!"

"Mr. Parks—as I had known him in my girlhood—used to be a sanctimonious individual, with a demure look, slow and drawling speech, large spectacles, a limp white neck-cloth, and a suit of seedy black. Now he had a gay dashing sort of appearance, as much as such an ill-favoured person—with his red hair and whiskers, and freckled face—*could* have. He was most fashionably apparelled; his look was anything but sanctimonious; the spectacles on the nose were eschewed for gold eye-glasses hanging over the waistcoat; and instead of his speech being drawling, it was rapid and off-hand, until it suddenly sank into lugubrious lowness of tone at the point when he thought fit to go into the dismals on account of his deceased mother. I certainly never had seen anything very saint like in respect to the late Mrs. Parks; and there was really something blasphemously ludicrous in the manner in which he had alluded to her as an angel in heaven.

"You will come and dine with us at five, Ellen," repeated Mr. Parks. "I will send my carriage for you——pray be in readiness."

I should have refused the invitation were it not for the assurance which he had given me to the effect that he had a great many things to tell me; and my curiosity was naturally excited as I thought that these things must be certain to concern me somewhat, and that they would perhaps elucidate the mystery of that strange man's connexion with my deceased grandfather as well as with Mrs. Parks and her son. I therefore accepted the invitation, and promised to be in readiness by the time the carriage should arrive for me. We then parted,—the brilliant equipage dashing along in one direction, and I pursuing my way in another.

Punctually at a quarter to five o'clock I was dressed in evening costume; and Mr. Parks's carriage arrived to take me to his house. It was a close carriage that he had sent, and of a magnificence to be in perfect keeping with the equipage I had seen in the morning. On arriving at the lawyer's mansion—which was in a fashionable West End square—I was conducted up to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Parks received me. She was a little mean-looking woman, with a very vixenish expression of countenance—though she now endeavoured to render herself as amiable as possible. I found her alone; and as she invited me to take a seat, she gave me to understand that her husband would make his appearance in a few minutes. She then proceeded to chatter away about her children, who, she informed me, were all absent from home at the time, at the different schools which they frequented, according to their ages and sexes. I should observe that the house was large and sumptuously furnished,—everything denoting the possession of great wealth on the part of its proprietor. But there was an utter absence of good taste in all the appointments; so that its very splendour had an air of tawdriness—and its rooms, crowded with furniture and costliest nick-nacks, seemed more intended for ostentatious display than for domestic comfort.

Presently the door opened somewhat abruptly; and Mr. Parks made his appearance, at the same time ushering in another gentleman.

This latter individual had a military appearance. He was in reality, as I afterwards learnt, not more than five-and-thirty years of age—but he looked at least forty, on account of a certain dissipated appearance and the ravages which debauchery had made upon him. Thus, beneath the eyes the flesh looked somewhat blue and swollen: there were hard lines across his brow, and wrinkles at the corners of the eyes. He had light sandy hair, and large moustachios, scarcely a shade deeper in hue. Handsome he had decidedly been; and his profile was still good. He was tall and well made: his appearance was not only military, but likewise aristocratically distinguished. His manners were those of a polished gentleman, when he thought fit to render them so; but in the course of the evening I fancied that he surveyed me with a boldness which at times amounted to a mingled insolence and familiarity which brought the colour to my cheeks.

"My dear Ellen," said Mr. Parks as he made his appearance in company with the gentleman whom I have just described, "I am delighted to see you. I had intended that we should dine alone, as I have a great deal to say to you: but I met Colonel Bellew at the door—he is an intimate friend of mine—he has the run of the house—so he was just dropping in to take pot-luck with us—and I could not refuse him—Colonel Bellew, allow me the honour of presenting you to Miss Percy."

The Colonel bowed, and said with a polite smile, "It should have been very sorry indeed, Parks, if you had refused me the pleasure of dining at your table on such an occasion."

It will have been seen from the lawyer's observations that though he lived in th[illegible] much splendour and affected so much state, he nevertheless had not contrived to discard certain vulgarities from his discourse; and I could not help wondering that the polished and distinguished Colonel Bellew should entertain such a bosom friendship for the somewhat course-minded Mr. Parks.

Dinner was shortly afterwards announced: the Colonel offered me his arm; and we descended to the dining room. It was not a mere dinner—it was a banquet of the most sumptuous description,—a very pleasant sort of "pot-luck" for the Colonel to be enabled to drop in upon whenever he may think fit. Yet with the wretched false taste and that inverse system of boasting into which upstarts and *parvenus* are sure to fall, Mr. and Mrs. Parks apologized for the meal,—declaring "it was a mere family dinner—they had only intended to treat me as one of themselves—and that they could not possibly have foreseen the Colonel meant to join them that day."

There were wines in profusion: Colonel Bellew did justice to the champagne; and it was when getting heated therewith that he began to regard me across the table in a way that I did not like. Methought that on two or three occasions Parks shook his head deprecatingly at his friend, as much as to give him to understund that the bold earnestness of his regards was annoying me. I was glad when the dessert was placed upon the table, and Mrs. Parks shortly afterwards rose and conducted me up to the drawing-room. I should observe that not the slightest reference had been made the whole time to my own personal circumstances: the name of the Normans was not mentioned. I did not even know

w[illegible]rs. Parks were aware that I was preparing for the stage. Nor could I even conjecture how Mr. Parks ascertained my address when he was purposing to call on me in the morning. Now that I was alone with his wife in the drawing-room, I naturally thought that she would discourse with me on those topics; but nothing of the sort. She expatiated on the pleasures of London life—the large circle of fashionable friends which she and her husband possessed—the number of her servants—the elegance of her parties—and the prices of the costly ornaments which were everywhere so heaped about that it was impossible to move through the drawing-room without running the risk of doing some damage with the sleeves or skirts of one's dress. Thinking that possibly Mr. or Mrs. Parks might have communicated with my aunt at Paisley, I questioned the lady on the subject; but she replied in the negative, and instantaneously flew off at a tangent to tell me how much she had given for a particular china monster which stood upon a *console*, and how old Lady Mulligatawney, the nabob's wife, had gone into fits at finding herself outbidden at the sale of curiosities were the aforesaid china monster was purchased for the express behoof of Mrs. Parks, who had seen and fallen in love with it the day before.

It was not till past ten o'clock that the two gentlemen joined us in the drawing-room; and then I perceived that both were much the worse for the wine of which they had partaken. Mr. Parks leant against the wall to sip his coffee; and there he swayed to and fro in a manner which seemed every instant to threaten his equilibrium with discomfiture. The Colonel walked perfectly steady—but had a very flushed countenance. Disgusted with the scene—wearied of Mrs. Parks's tirades relative to the prices of her furnitureand nick-nacks—and perceiving that there was no chance of my obtaining on this occasion any informationin respect to the many things that Mr. Parks had expressed himself desirous to talk about—I whispered to the lady that I should like to return home.

"I am very sorry, my dear Miss Percy," she answered, also in a whisper, "that we cannot send the carriage with you, as the coachman begged leave to go out this evening, his father being dead or something of the sort. But if you do not mind a hackney-coach—unless indeed you will accept a bed here for the night——"

"Thank you for your kindness," I responded; "but I must return to my friends, or they would be uneasy—and it is perfectly the same to me whether I ride in a carriage or a hackney-coach."

Mr. Parks rang the bell—the order was given to the footman to fetch a hackney-coach,—and I rose to take my leave. Mr. Parks and Colonel Bellew insisted on seeing me down to the vehicle; and I was dreadfully afraid lest the Colonel should offer to accompany me as far as Hunter Street. The proposal however, which I was fully determined to resist, was not made; and the hackney-coach rolled away from the front of the lawyer's dwelling.

I reclined back in the vehicle, thinking of all that had taken place,—wondering how the parkses could have become so rich, and whether all their fortune were based upon the money originally bequeathed by my grandfather to his housekeeper,—wondering likewisewhether hehadforeseen that his money would

for ever be alienated from me, or whether he had intended it to become mine at that old woman's death—and more than half suspecting that his dying instructions could not have been fulfilled to the very letter. I was so absorbed in these reflections that I took no notice of the course the hackney-coach was pursuing—until the idea gradually dawned in unto my mind that the journey back to Hunter Street was much longer than that from Hunter Street to the lawyer's house. I rose from my half reclining posture, and looked from the window the hackney-coach was passing rapidly by some railing, iron behind which there were trees. The night was excessively dark—a misty rain was falling—both the windows were closed; and as I only observed objects dimp, methought we were passing through one of the squares. I reclined back again: another ten minutes must have elapsed—still the equipage was rolling along, and with increased rapidity. I felt assured that the driver had ma e some mistake as to the address that had been given to him, though it was I myself who had mentioned that address at starting. I pulled the cheekstring: but it drew in all the way—the coachman was not holding it in his hand. I put down one of the windows, and called out to him.

"All right, miss," he said, "it's a little mistake on my part—I missed the way—but in five minutes you will be there."

Perfectly satisfied with the explanation—though somewhat annoyed by the delay—I reclined back again; and for some few minutes longer gave way to my reflections. From these I was startled by the sudden stopping of the hackney-coach. It was quite dark, and now raining in torrents. The door was hastily opened [illegible] y expanded, was [illegible] ead by a man-servant—while a female threw a cloak upon my shoulders, the hood falling over my head. I had not the slightest doubt that these were Mr. Norman's domestics. I hurried up the steps—hastily entered the hall—and then the conviction flashed to my mind that I was in a strange place. The front door was closed:—in mingled consternation and affright I glanced at the servants who had introduced me thither: their faces were unknown to me as the aspect of the hall itself!

"Good heavens!" I said, "there is some mistake! I beg a thousand pardons for the intrusion and for the trouble I have given! Pray stop the hackney coach—But I recollect! I have not paid the man his fare!"

"This way, miss, if you please—it is all right, said the female servant, who was a woman of about forty years of age, and with not a very prepossessing countenance; for though her tone was respectful, yet there was a lurking cunning in her eyes which filled me with alarm.

'I tell you that I do not live here—and you *must* know it!" I exclaimed, as I turned towards the front door.

"You cannot leave the house, miss," said the manservant—a tall, pompous-looking, half-insolent fellow, with a leer upon his lips. "As Kate says, it's all right. The coach is gone—and the man's fare is paid."

I sank down upon one of the hall-chairs, gasping in breathless terror. That I was the victim of some treachery, I now felt convinced. But suddenly starting up, I summoned all my courage to my aid, saying, "Suffer me to depart immediately! At your peril detain me here!"

"The plain fact is miss," replied

the [illegible] prisoner—and it [illegible] ow any airs, because they won't be attended to. Our orders are to treat you with respect; and this we are prepared to do. There are rooms ready for your reception; and you had better retire to them at once. To-morrow perhaps you will see some one who can tell you more about it."

"Whose house is this?" I demanded, in a hoarse voice—for I was terribly agitated: indeed I could scarcely prevent myself from shrieking out in the wildness of despair.

"That question you must reserve for to-morrow, if you please, miss," replied the footman. "Our orders are to say as little as possible, and to do your bidding in all things so long as we see that you don't escape."

Again I sat down, overwhelmed with a sense of consternation and alarm. Who could possibly have done this? Whose house was it? All in a moment a suspicion flashed to my mind. That Colonel Bellew who had appeared to drop in accidentally to dine—who had regarded me with such bold libertine familiarity—and who had all along seemed to have some particularly intimate understanding with Mr. Parks,—then the excuse for not sending me home in the carriage—and the substitution of the hackney-coach,—yes, everything combined to strengthen my suspicion that the whole proceeding was a treacherous plot in which Mr. and Mrs. Parks were the vile accomplices and Colonel Bellew was the principal? But I saw that it was useless to remonstrate with these domestics, and that perhaps if I appeared to submit patiently, some avenue of escape might present itself. I accordingly did my best to compose my feelings, and intimated to the female servant that I would retire to the chamber provided for me.

It was a magnificent house to which I had been brought. The hall was spacious, and adorned with statues. A marble staircase led up to a landing decorated with more statues and with immense porcelain vases. To the next landing we ascended; and there the female servant—who answered to the name of Catherine—opened a door and conducted me into an ante-room exquisitely fitted up as a boudoir. Nothing could exceed the refinement of taste which here mingled with the evidence of wealth. There was a large chamber adjoining; and the appointments of this room almost transcend description. Splendid alabaster statues holding lamps in their hands—the costliest hangings to the windows and the most splendid draperies to the bed a carpet so thick that she felt sank deep into it—a toilet-table covered with all necessaries, as well as with an infinite variety of elegances in the form of perfumes, oils, pomatums, scented soaps—in a word, this chamber apppeared to have been fitted up for the reception of some princess who from her cradle was accustomed to be surrounded everything that wealth could purchase.

It must not however be supposed that I was in a mood to be either dazzled or pleased by whatsoever thus met the eye: I was so profoundly the prey to mingled anguish and alarm that I could scarcely restrain my feelings in the presence of the domestic; and when she had retired, I flung myself upon my knees at the foot of the couch weeping bitterly.

How I passed that wretched night I can now scarcely tell. I did not disapparel myself: I did not even lie down upon the bed, for fear

lest slumber should overtake me. Sometimes I walked about in an almost frenzied state; at others I sat down and sank into the deepest despondency—or else gave way to my anguish in tears. What mischief was in store for me? This was the question that afflicted me far more than even the idea of what the Normans might think had become of me; inasmuch as they might tranquilize themselves with the belief that I had remained to sleep at the Parkses' house: but, on the other hand, *my* harrowing misgivings pointed towards frightful calamities.

I must have fallen asleep through sheer exhaustion: for on gradually awaking as daylight was stealing in at the window, I found myself seated—or rather half reclining upon the sofa, from the cushion of which I was lifting my aching head. My brows throbbed with the most painful sensation; and there was a strange feverish feeling all over me. Still there was some consolation in the knowledge that the night had passed undisturbed—that the morning had come—and that the presence of the daylight would perhaps offer some opportunity of escape. Drawing aside the window-draperies, I looked forth, and beheld a garden with green-houses and conservatories. There were several other dwellings near, all with gardens likewise; and I could not at first conjecture in what quarter of the metropolis I thus found myself—until my looks, wandering about, settled upon a dome which I recognised to be that of the Colosseum in the Regent's Park. It was about three-quarters of a mile distant and therefore I was enabled to form a tolerably accurate idea of the situation of the house to which I had been brought.

A glance at the mirror upon the toilet-table shocked me with the pale, careworn aspect of my countenance. My head was still aching fearfully; and I began to perform my ablutions. For the purposes of the toilet there was, as I have already said, every requisite; and when I had copiously bathed my throbbing brows, the pain diminished. I however looked amongst the articles on the toilet-table for some volatile salts or pungent essence, which might refresh me still more. I could find nothing that suited. A drawer which stood partially open, contained fragrant cakes of soap; and therefore methought that the other drawers might perhaps be stored with additional toilet accessories. I opened a second drawer; it was filled with various nicknacks—but contained not the article which I sought. I opened a third drawer; and this was empty, save in respect to some few papers which appeared to have been hastily crushed up in the hand and thrust in there. I took them forth. I will confess that I seized upon them greedily: the idea struck me that they might possibly afford some clue as to the ownership of the house, and thus set at rest any uncertainty which I might still entertain upon the point. Feeling myself to be the victim of a foul treachery, I had not the slightest hesitation nor punctilious delicacy in examining these papers.

They proved however to be mere scraps, or fragments in an incomplete state. One was a portion of a bill from a perfumer's and was duly receipted, but with a name which I could not read: the head of the bill was missing—and therefore I could not ascertain who was the purchaser nor who the tradesman. Another was a bill—or rather the fragment of one—for hay, corn, and other provender supplied for horses; and a third was a portion of an under-

tak… …ral that had evid… …ted on a very expensive scale. But still I could glean no names. One fragment alone remained; and this was a portion of a letter written in a beautiful feminine hand, though with a certain degree of tremulousness, as if the writer had been labouring under the greatest excitement at the time. This impression too was all the more powerfully conveyed by the fact that many of the words were underlined with three or four dashes, as if to give the most vigorous emphasis possible to the terms which expressed the strong feelings of the writer. Leaving out a few words which were upon the uneven parts of the upper and lower edges of the fragment, the intelligible and consecutive portion would run as follows :—

"Therefore do I bid you an eternal farewell! Yes—it is eternal! Never, never again will you behold the wretched being around whose heart you woye your spells! Never, never again shall you hear of her whom a stupendous infatuation made your victim! Oh, tears—tears for the remainder of my life!—naught, naught but tears! Ah, will they wipe away the stain? May God have mercy upon me! I feel distracted. I am like a maniac imprisoned and chained in a cell, wanting to do something, but yet not rightly understanding what it is that the soul yearns to do. Oh! is it suicide which is thus sitting like a black shape of vagueness, yet awful and terrible, amidst the darkness of my thoughts? My soul is harrowed: vulture-claws are tearing at my brain: serpents are piercing my heart with their stings. The talons of the former strike deeper and deeper into that brain; the fiery snakes tighten their coils around that heart. My tongue is parched, as if ashes were in my throat. Oh, for water! No!—tears, tears, tears must be my portion for evermore! But again I say, will they wipe away this sense of crime? Oh, the power of love, that it should have made me what I am! Was there ever such a love as mine? Thou wast mine idol; I deemed thee an angel until thou didst reveal thyself as a fiend! God heavens! that when methought I was listening in the soft ecstasy of ineffable tenderness, to the beatific language of passion which you were breathing in my mine ear, your words should gradually take a different meaning—so that I (unconsciously at first) found myself listening to such an insidious tale as none but Satan's breath could waft in unto the brain. And yet it was so!—and I yielded—God help me! I yielded! I who was first the victim of love, became the victim of crime! But thou, O man! what art thou now doing in the world? Art thou happy for all this? No, no! Even if thou art racked with one millionth portion of the horrible thoughts, feelings, and sensation which are preying upon me—tearing my brain, stinging my heart, poisoning my very life-blood at its source,—my God! if thou dost experience as much only of all these horrors as a drop is to the illimitable ocean, thou wilt——"

Here the contents of the fragment, as appalling as they were strange, abruptly broke off; and the paper fell from my hand. I had read those lines with feelings of the intensest horror; but all of a sudden the idea smote me that they must be the ravings of a maniac; and then a sense of immeasurable compassion took possession of my heart. With that beautiful handwriting, bespeaking the highest refinement of education and taste, naturally became associated an idea of trans-

cending beauty on the part of the authoress. But, Ah! again did a feeling of horror spring up in my mind, as I thought to myself that she might have been the victim of some treachery ere her intellects were turned. And was not the author of *her* miseries the same who had rendered *me* a captive within the walls of that dwelling? The place suddenly assumed another aspect: it was no longer exquisite in its appointments nor splendid in its draperies, its gilding, its sculptures, and its furniture: it struck cold and awful upon my soul, as if it were the gloomiest of dungeons, fraught with all the most terrible traditions of deeds of crime, treachery, and murder. Had I found myself suddenly transported into a cell whence a howling maniac had just been conveyed away—and had my eyes fallen upon chains attached to the walls, rotting straw upon the damp pavement-floor, and massive bars at the windows, the revulsion of my feelings could not have been more powerful nor more fearful.

From this dread state was I suddenly aroused by a knocking at the door of the chamber; and the voice of the female-servant inquired whether I wanted anything. I proceeded to open the door; for I had fast locked it on the preceding evening. Catherine looked at me, evidently with some degree of surprise, as if she saw by my appearance that I had not been to bed all night, and as if she marvelled that my position should have so great an effect upon my mind. I said nothing, but issued forth from the chamber: I was determined at once to ascertain to what extent I was a prisoner in the house; for if I were permitted to penetrate into the garden, I was resolved either to scale the walls or else by my cries to bring the neighbours to my aid. Catherine followed me down t[illegible]ving open the doo[illegible] back parlour, she requested me to walk in. The room was elegantly furnished; and a table was spread for breakfast. A glance, however, showed me that it was only laid for one person.

"Who is your master? and when will he be here?" I inquired.

"The first question I cannot answer," said the servant-woman; "to the second I can only reply that he will be here in the course of the day."

"I need no refreshment. Let me walk out in the garden I am suffocating for the want of fresh air."

"You compel me to speak plainly, miss," rejoined Catherine. "You cannot go into the garden. Pray be tractable—or you will compel us to use means——"

"Enough!" I said, literally shivering with desperation, "Spare your threats——"

"I must add one word," said the woman,—"which is that the slightest attempt to raise any cries from the windows——"

"Enough! enough!" I ejaculated stamping my foot vehemently. "I see that you are capable of anything!"

I flung myself upon a sofa and Catherine quitted the room. There was something so resolute in her countenance while she spoke, that I was frightened: I felt myself to be completely in the power of the inmates of that dwelling. Vague ideas of a terrible coercion had floated through my brain; and I had no more power nor courage for any active measures than if I were under the influence of a horrible nightmare dream, from which, with the fantastic fearfulness of such visions, I vainly strove to free myself. I touched nothing that was upon the breakfast-table: I fell in-

to a s[illegible] my energies were [illegible]ed, as if my very spirit itself was broken.

Thus several hours passed away; and I made no attempt to quit that room. At length I gradually woke up as it were from the stupor of utter despondency and now an idea struck me. Fool that I was, when alone in my chamber, not to raise the window and shriek out for assistance! But it might not even now be too late?—and, inspired by this wild hope, I issued from the breakfast-parlour. A porter was seated in the hall: he seemed to be dozing in his great chair, and apparently took no notice of me. I ascended the stairs I reached the second floor; and Catherine came out of a room adjoining my own. I entered the latter: she followed me; and, as if divining my intention, she said, "Remember my injunctions, miss! Your cries would be useless; we should find some pretext to account for them; and rest assured that you would not improve your condition."

She then walked away with an air of so much confidence in her power ever me, that all my hopes vanished, and I again sank into utter despondency. I threw myself upon the sofa, and gave went to my tears. As I presently wiped them away, my looks settled on the paper which had fallen on the carpet,—that fragment the contents of which were so awful, so harrowing! The ideas which that scrap of paper conjured up in my mind were intolerable: for in the morbid state of my feelings, I could not help identifying myself with the maniac condition in which I believed that the writer of that letter must have been plunged. I started up, and thrust it along with the other papers into the drawer whence I had taken it. Scarcely had I done this, when my ear caught the sounds of footsteps in the ante-room. I turned round suddenly: the chamber-door, which I had left ajar, opened; and Colonel Bellew made his appearance.

A scream was about to burst from my lips, when a quick revulsion of feelings seized upon me: I was in a moment nerved with a strength of mind that astonished myself.

"Begone, sir!" I said: "dare not thus to intrude upon my presence! There is law in England to punish this outrage of which you have been guilty!"

It seemed as if the Colonel were astounded at the manner in which I addressed him; and my courage rose in proportion.

"Your myrmidons," I continued, "have obeyed your orders only too effectually, and have kept me a prisoner here. But *you* will not dare bar my way!"

While thus speaking, I hastily put on my bonnet and shawl; and still nerved with all the fortitude which the very desperation of my circumstances had conjured up, I moved towards the threshold on which he stood.

"No, by heaven!" he suddenly exclaimed, closing the door, and placing his back against it; "you shall not leave me thus!—you shall hear me—yes, by heaven! you shall hear me!"

I was now overwhelmed with terror again: my mind underwent a quick transition—my courage vanished.

"Beautiful girl—adorable Ellen!" continued the Colonel, "I beseech you to listen to me! Drive me not to madness; goad me not to desperation!"

A piercing scream pealed from my lips; and at that instant a loud double knock at the front door thundered through the house.

"For heaven's sake, be silent!" exclaimed the Colonel: "be silent! Betray me not! and you shall presently be free!"

"No—this instant!" I exclaimed: "this instant must I depart! Stand aside. I command you!"

"Never, never, will I thus abandon you!" cried Bellew; "never will I thus surrender up my conquest!"

His countenance suddenly grew inflamed, as with extended arms he rushed towards me.

Another loud, long, rending scream pealed from my lips: Bellow's arms encircled me—I struggled desperately—shriek after shriek did I send ringing forth. There was the hasty rush of footsteps on the stairs—the door burst open—and as the Colonel suddenly quitted his hold upon me, I sank exhausted and half senseless upon the sofa. Dizziness and bewilderment was in my brain: I waf only vaguely and dimly aware of some brief passing altercation which ensued. Then the door slammed violently—I started up—Edwin St. Clair sank upon his knees at my feet.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOX AT THE THEATRE.

My joy at this sudden deliverance was so great and bewildering, that I could not immediately find terms wherein to express my gratitude. Forgotten too was the scene of the present incidents: I remembered not that it was in the sanctity of the chamber where my deliverer thus remained.

"Ellen," he cried, "behold me at your feet! Hear me beseech you to bestow one smile—one kind look upon him who has had the happiness of s[illegible] a moment—"

"My heartfelt gratitude is yours, Captain St. Clair," I interrupted him: then suddenly recollecting where this appeal on his own behalf was made, the flush of wounded pride, not altogether unmingled with indignation, appeared upon my cheeks; and I said, "You will have the goodness—the generosity—at once to retire."

He sprang up to his feet, as if he himself were only at the instant rendered sensible of the fact that he was lingering in a place where he ought not to be; and my indignation vanishing, I said, "Await me on the stairs: I will be with you in a moment."

He bowed, and the door closed behind him. I drank a draught of cold water; for my throat was parched with the effect of all the excitement which within the last few minutes I had endured; and I hastily readjusted my toilet. My heart was still all in a flutter; and there was still a species of bewildering sensation in my brain. In a few moments I left the room, and found St. Clair waiting for me on the first landing.

"That villain has gone, Miss Percy," were the words in which he hastened to address me—thus alluding to Colonel Bellew. "Enter here for a few minutes, to tranquillize and compose yourself."

He indicated a door which stood open, and which revealed a splendidly-furnished drawing room. I was scarcely the mistress of my own actions, so much did I indeed feel the necessity of a few minutes' leisure to regain my self-possession and composure. I entered the drawing room, and sat down. St. Clair took a seat at a little distance: and he said in the softest tones of his harmonious voice, and with an

undeserv[illegible]. You have now displayed the true generosity of your character in its wonted and most natural light. Of course, Miss Percy, I mean that you should inform Mr. and Mrs. Parks of the villanous deed perpetrated by their friend Colonel Bellew—so that they may be put upon their guard against him. But to all the rest of the world secrecy and silence! Pardon me for adding that your fair fame must not stand even the slightest risk of being tarnished by the breath of scandal. As for Bellew himself, he will only be too glad to hush up an exploit which has terminated to his discomfiture."

"Again, Captain St. Clair," I said, "do I express my heartfelt gratitude towards you:" then as I gave him my hand, I added, "You have intimated that we may be friends: pray let us be always so!"

Although I bent down my countenance in confusion as I spoke, yet I gave to the concluding words a certain emphasis which was as much much as to imply that he was to consider it impossible he could ever be *more* to be me than a mere friend. As he retained my hand for a few seconds in his own, his countenance —which, as the reader knows, was most remarkably handsome—assumed an expression of such ineffable sadness, mingled with so much appealing tenderness, that I experienced a boundless compassion for him who loved me so well yet loved me so vainly.

"You shall now depart, Miss Percy," he said: "my carriage is at the door—use it—I will go in another direction. You ought to drive at once to the house of Mr. Parks; and there you can dismiss my equipage. His own carriage can take you home; and thus the Normans need not suspect that you have been elsewhere—unless indeed they should have already discovered it—which I think is however by no means probable; for when they found that you did not return home last night, they would naturally conclude that you had remained with the friends with whom you were so intimate, and beneath whose roof you might so well sojourn, inasmuch as they had known you from your childhood."

Captain St. Clair handed me down the stairs: and I was pleased as not encountering any of the servants of the house, as their presence would only have excited my indignant blood after the coercive treatment I had experienced. St. Clair assisted me into his carriage—ordered me to be driven to the house of Mr. Parks—and raising his hat, sped away in another direction. During my ride to the lawyer's abode, I reviewed all the adventures through which I had passed; and I came to the conclusion that St. Clair was perfectly right in the counsel he had given me with regard to maintaining silence on the subject. Inexperienced as I comparatively was in the wickedness of the world, yet I could not help comprehending that a construction most prejudicial to myself might be put upon the incident by ill natured imaginations and scandalous tongues.

On arriving at Mr. Park's house, I dismissed Captain St. Clairs carriage and on ascending to the drawing-room, found Mr. Parks and his wife seated there alone together. They appeared to be surprised on beholding me: but when I extended my hand towards them, they gave me the most cordial welcome. Without many preparatory words I began to explain all the adventures which I had experienced; but my narrative was frequently interrupted by the vehement ejaculations which burst from the lips of both.

"Oh, Mr. Parks!" exclaimed

the lady, when I had finished; "what a villain is this whom we have been receiving at the house!—"what a serpent have you been cherishing in your breast!"

"I tell you what it is, Mrs. Parks," said the lawyer; "Ellen shall be avenged for this! I will immediately go and issue process against the scoundrel Bellew; and he shall smart for it. It is a glorious action!—forcible abduction—the liberty of the subject violated—detention *vi et armis* for an entire night and a good part of a day—menaces—intimidation—coercion—and it almost amounts to assault and battery! By heaven, we will lay the damages at five thousand pounds."

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Parks, for your zeal in my cause," I said: "but under existing circumstances it will be better to hush the matter up completely. That is Captain St. Clair's advice—"

"I don't care about anybody's advice!" ejaculated the lawyer, dashing his clenched fist upon the table in such a state of excitement that I had never before seen him display.

"Really, Mr. Parks," said his wife "all things considered and chiefly for Ellen's sake, you know—"

"Ah, I forgot!" said the lawyer, becoming appeased, and therewith thoughtful: "publicity has its inconveniences. Well, well, perhaps it will be better to hush the matter up. But understand me well, Mrs. Parks!—that scoundrel Bellew shall never again set his foot within the walls of this house; I cut him henceforth and for ever! As for Captain St. Clair, I long to make his acquaintance, and to express my gratitude for his admirable conduct. Do you know where he lives, Ellen?"

"No," I responded. "I have heard that he has a country seat in Hertfordshire—Ah! by the bye, I recollect; Mr. [illegible] written a note or two t[illegible]g him for presents of game; and he has directed his letters to some club at the West End."

"Perhaps the Junior United Service?" suggested Mr. Parks, "as Captain St. Clair has been in the army."

"That is the club!" I rejoined. "I remember hearing the name mentioned."

"Very well! Then I shall write to Captain St. Clair," said the lawyer. "Mrs. Parks," he added, turning to his spouse, "when you give that grand ball of yours?"

"Next Monday evening," replied the lady.

"Very good!" ejaculated Parks. "We will send the carriage to fetch you, Ellen, at nine o'clock; and on that occasion we will take care it shall be in readiness to convey you home again. Mrs. Parks, have the goodness to sit down and write an invitation to Captain St. Clair. I will enclose it in a letter of my own."

"Mr. Parks," I said, "I thank you for your invitation: but I am not accustomed to fashionable society—I mean," I added with a slight blush, "not that of ladies—"

"Oh, nonsense, Ellen! We shall be proud to introduce you. But here is the carriage at the door; and it shall take you home. I agree with you—it will be better to hush up the occurrences of last night, and therefore you need say nothing to your friends the Normans. It is fortunate they did not send to inquire after you."

I took leave of Mr. and Mrs. Parks; and during the drive back to Hunter Street, I more than once reproached myself with the idea of my injustice in having thrown suspicion upon persons who had

just dis[illegible]ves so eager to espouse my [illegible]—so anxious to punish the author of the outrage, and so zealous to express their gratitude towards my deliverer. On reaching Hunter Street—which was at about four o'clock in the afternoon—I found the Normans awaiting in the drawing-room the announcement of dinner; and as there were three or four guests present, I escaped much questioning, and was thus spared the necessity of giving any evasive replies, or of condescending to falsehood. I found that the Normans fancied I had been all the time at the Parkses' house, and that they considered it natural enough. When they went to the theatre, I excused myself from accompanying them: for being wearied and exhausted, I was anxious to have a good night's rest.

On the following day, when I again reviewed all that had passed, I had still some little uneasiness in my mind as to whether Captain St. Clair would fulfil the half pledge he had given me and abstain from provoking Colonel Bellew to a duel. I hoped that he would call on some pretext, in order that I might be convinced that he had fulfilled my wishes in that respect: but the forenoon wore away—and he came out. There were no rehearsals at the theatre that day; and therefore the Normans lunched at home. Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe dropped in; and Mr. Norman, in the course of conversation, inquired if he had recently seen his friend St. Clair?

"Not for the last two days," responded his lordship: and then he again turned to whisper in the ear of Juliet, who listened to him with a flush upon the cheeks and a smile upon the lips.

The afternoon passed: dinner was announced;—still St. Clair came not. The trouble of my mind was increasing. It was not that I loved him: let not the reader suppose it for an instant. Had it been anyone else who succoured me under similar circumstances, I should have felt an equal dread at the horrors of a duel on my account. I went to the theatre in the hope that I might see him there: but as I sat in the box with the elderly widow-lady, who, as I have before said, so kindly acted as my *chaperone* on these occasions, I for some time vainly looked around in the anxious expectation of beholding the object of my thoughts. At length the door of the box in which I am the elderly lady were seated alone together, opened; and Captain St. Clair made his appearance. It was the first time he had ever sought me in that box or in the society of the elderly lady who had been an actress in her time: and the idea flashed to my mind that something had happened. A second glance, confirming that suspicion, turned the blood into ice in my veins: St. Clair's left arm was in a sling!

"Good evening, Miss Percy," he said, with his wonted air of easy politeness, as he proffered me his hand: but at the same time he darted upon me a look which was as much as to bid me command any emotion that the spectacle of the sling might have conjured up. "Will you present me to your friend that I may offer my apologies for intruding into her box?"

I know not how I murmured forth the necessary words of introduction between Captain St. Clair and my elderly friend: but the latter was infinitely pleased at having so fashionable a gentleman in her box; and there was consequently no need for apologies. The worthy lady, however, suspected no doubt

that it was not she herself who was the object of St. Clair's attraction to that box; and after a few ordinary civilities had been interchanged between herself and her new acquaintance, she turned to devote herself with redoubled attention to the proceedings of the stage.

Meanwhile I had been sitting in the cold torpid state of semi-stupefaction at the idea that a duel had after all taken place on my account, and that St. Clair had been wounded. Methought, too, that while he was making a few courteous observations to my elderly friend—and assuring her in answer to an inquiry which she put, that he had merely experienced a confusion on the left shoulder by a fall from his horse,—methought, I say, that he was in reality suffering great pain, which with a stoical fortitude he was striving to conceal. The story of a fall from a horse I did not for a single instant believe; and all the time I sat in that cold torpor of the senses, my looks were fixed with a deep, deep compassion upon St. Clair's countenance. At length the elderly lady turned towards the stage St. Clair placed himself next to me; and I said in a low deep whisper, "Tell me—for God's sake tell me, what has taken place?"

"My dear Miss Percy," he answered, likewise in a whisper, "do not give yourself any uneasiness. It is nothing——I shall be well in a few days;"—but at that same instant over his countenance there passed an expression which pained and afflicted me to behold.

"You are suffering at this instant," I said, with the tears ready to gush out of my eyes; "you are suffering—and I cannot bear to see it!"

A glow of pleasure succeeded that of pain upon his countenance—while I felt [illegible] mantling in crimson upon my own, as the thought struck me that I had been betrayed by my feelings of regret, compassion, and distress, into saying something that might me interpreted in a warmer and more tender sense.

"Miss Percy," continued St. Clair, "I knew all the time—yesterday—that these must be a duel to-day; for I and Bellew had placed ourselves in a position towards each other which rendered a hostile encounter absolutely necessary. You must not think that because Bellew proved himself to be a villain towards yourself, he was either debarred from seeking satisfaction from me—or that I was deprived of any right or pretext for demanding such satisfaction from him. The code of 'honour'——and here St. Clair gave a peculiar smile for an instant—"is very different! I knew therefore that this duel must take place——"

"And yet you pledged yourself," I said more than half reproachfully, "that you would abstain——"

"My dear Ellen," interrupted St. Clair, "I am sure you would not have me stand the chance of being branded as a coward. No—never!"—and here his countenance again grew flushed with an animation that rendered him strikingly handsome—handsome though he at all times was, even in his most ordinary moments. "But knowing that the encounter *must* ensue, there was nevertheless no need to distress your mind with the assurance that such was the case. Oh! had you not already suffered enough to render me anxious to save you every additional pang? Ah! and believe me, Ellen, that even when I stood face to face with my enemy it was sweet—Oh! it was sweet to know that I was daring death on your

account! And as this wound, I esteem it light—trivial—absolute nothingness, in comparison with all that I would so gladly and cheerfully endure for your sake!"

"Captain St. Clair," I said, in accents that were scarcely audible, so strong were the emotions of distress, sympathy, and affliction that were agitating within me; "you know not how I am grieved to think that this should have occurred! Upon my gratitude—upon my friendship—you have everlasting claims: but humble as I am, how can I hope to be enabled to testify either? And now, Captain St. Clair," I hurriedly added, "I presume that the whole circumstances will become known——"

"Not so!" interrupted St. Clair; "think you that I was not all along careful of that reputation of yours, Ellen, which as—as—your—your friend——your—your—brother——for you have told me I may consider myself so——I value infinitely more than my own?—and that is speaking with an immensity of emphasis; for as a rule, what can be dearer to a man than his own repute? However, I repeat, I took care of everything that concerned yourself. In a private note I appealed to Bellew's honour to be silent on the subject; and to our seconds pretexted a different cause of quarrel—or at least we so altered the main facts that even if the duel itself should become known, public attention cannot be turned towards yourself?"

"I feel all the embarrassment, Captain St. Clair," I said, "of being compelled to repeat over and over again the expression of my heartfelt gratitude."

"Gratitude, Ellen?" said Edwin St. Clair, in the most melting tones of his voice of manly harmony; "wherefore use that word? Oh, if you knew how cheerfully I would have died for you;—and, Oh! if you could only conjecture how sincerely I shall wish myself dead if your words and looks continue to deny me all hope——"

"Captain St Clair," interrupted him, looking up into his countenance with an expression of the most earnest and ingenuous appeal on my own features,—"you possess my gratitude—you possess my friendship—and all that you have done and suffered on my behalf, necessarily gives you certain claims upon me. Thus I feel—Oh! I feel that he who has such claims, exercises as it were a power; and I entreat that you will wield your power generously—you will use it magnanimously! And now," I added, anxious to give a turn to the conversation, "tell me how fared it with Colonel Bellew?"

"He escaped totally unhurt," responded St. Clair.

"Ah!" I ejaculated, with a deep sense of vexation: "it is not a wickedness on my part to express a wish that he whose crime was the origin of the duel, should have borne all the punishment—and that the consequences had smitten him severely rather than yourself slightly."

"You know not, Ellen," whispered St. Clair, with a depth of tenderest pathos in his tone, "how sweet, how sweet it is to feel myself the object of your sympathy."

I gave no reply; but looked towards the stage. It was difficult—nay, it was impossible to continue a discourse on such a topic, without finding myself every moment compelled to say something whereon St. Clair might put a different interpretation from that which it ought to bear—something to which his own glowing mind might attribute a deeper meaning than was intended—something, in

short, which afforded him incessant opportunities to approach the theme that I was most anxious to avoid. As for checking him curtly or severely—as for telling him in plain terms that because he had rendered me services he must not take advantage of them,—all this was out of the question. Such representations on my part would have displayed an infusion of ingratitude and worn the aspect of heartlessness. The reader may therefore suppose that the position was a very awkward and embarrassing as well as a painful one for me.

I looked towards the stage; and for some minutes silence prevailed in our box. At length the idea stole in into my mind that I was now exhibiting a coldness and an indifference towards St. Clair which he was very far from deserving, and that I ought not to appear more engrossed with the proceedings of the drama than with the society of one who had perilled his life and was wounded in my cause. I therefore turned towards him with the intention of making some remark which should break the awakened silence, when I perceived that he was standing up close by the door with his right hand upon the latch, as if about to leave the box.

"I was only waiting, Miss Percy," he said, with an air of almost reproachful sadness—yet without the slightest tincture of coldness or reserve,—"to take my leave of you: for I perceive that you are so engrossed in the performances that my presence has become an intrusion."

The colour mounted to my cheeks, and the tears almost gushed forth from my eyes, as my heart smote me with the idea that this reproach was only too well founded.

"Captain St. Clair," I said, scarcely able to recover my voice, as it were, from the choking power of my feelings, "you wrong me—indeed you wrong me! Your words would tax me with ingratitude. God knows I am incapable—"

I stopped short,—my speech now entirely suffocated by the emotions that rose up into my very throat; and at the same time the tears which hitherto by a strong effort I had kept back, forced themselves a vent

"Good heaven, Miss Percy—Ellen—dear Ellen!" whispered St. Clair, hastily and excitedly, "I would not for words have done this I was wrong!—I imagined a coldness where none existed! Oh, I see, I see that I am not altogether indifferent to you!—and I rejoice at this wound which, severe though it be, has at length given an impulse to your feelings and has pleaded on my behalf more effectually than the most eloquent of my own words ever could have done."

I knew not how to answer: I was plunged into a perfect maze of bewilderment, perplexity, and confusion. To attempt matter-of-fact explanations and methodically to define that I experienced feelings of gratitude and friendship to the very uttermost, but love not in the least,—was impossible! It would have been to give an immediate justification to the charge of coldness already brought against me. Besides, had not the avowal slipped from St. Clair's tongue that his wound was a serious one? What did he mean? Though it was not mortal, yet still it might prove fatal? Oh, I shuddered at the idea! There was a man surrounded by all the accessories which render life valuable incurring the risk of losing that life on my account! It was impossible to meet him with harshness or cruelty—impossible to cast a damp upon his feelings,—impossible to do aught that should savour in the slightest degree of ingratitude on my part.

I remained [illegible] but I know that my looks must have been full of confusion and sympathy, bewilderment and compassion, strangely, indescribably blended. And St. Clair went on whispering in my ear. As I have a soul to be saved, I declare that I comprehended not at the time the full meaning of the words he was thus addressing to me,—in such a mist was my soul enveloped. But that their general sense was in respect to the feelings which he entertained towards me, I had a sort of intuitive knowledge, though vague and dim; and when the performances were over and he handed me into the Norman's carriage, it appeared to me as if I were only now for the first time awakening from a hazy dream which for the last half-hour had enthralled my senses.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BALL.

IT was monday night—the night of the grand ball to be given by Mr. and Mrs. Parks. I had decided upon being present, in consequence of a pressing note received from Mrs. Parks, and in consequence likewise of the well-meant representations of the Normans that I ought to cultivate the friendship of those wealthy persons who had known me from my childhood, and who appeared so ready and anxious to show me every attention. Juliet—who had not to attend the theatre on this paticular evening—was most kindly zealous in superintending the arrangements of my toilet.

"This white dress becomes you admirably, my dear Ellen," she said, as she surveyed me, when my oilet was complete with as much as miration as if she were a fond sister. "Your figure is perfect!—what beautiful flowing outlines! Oh, you will make a sensation to-night at this ball as you are shortly destined to do upon the stage! That mode of dressing your hair it bands, with braids at the sides, becomes you marvellously. And this camelia in your hair—how exquisitely in its whiteness does in throw out into contrast the raven darkness of that hair! You have not looked very well for the last three or four days—you have been pale; but now there is a colour upon your cheeks. Ah! it is easy to foretell that you will the star of the evening—you will make a hundred conquests to-night, Ellen!—many a breast will sigh to-morrow when thinking of you! Oh! you are exquisitely beautiful, with that smile upon your lips and the pearly teeth peeping between!"

Vainly did I endevour to stop Juliet Norman in the midst of her tirade: it was utterly impossible to arrest her volubly-uttered but well-meant compliments when once she launched out into such a strain. The Parkses' carriage was anounced: I entered it—and was driven to their house.

Some fifty or sixty guests were already assembled in the superbly-furnished drawing-rooms when I was announced; and Mrs. Parks, who sped forward to receive me, gave me to understand in a hasty whisper, and with a triumphant look, that she expected as many more.

The saloons certainly looked magnificent, flooded as they were with the lustre shed by the immense crystal chandeliers,—and that lustre taking a roseate tint from the crimson paper of the walls, the drapereis, and the furniture-fittings, all of a corresponding hue. Whatsoever was gaudy and inconsistent with

good taste in the arrangements of those rooms, as seen by daylight, was now merged in the one absorbing air of brilliant magnificence which made its due impression on the mind. I had expected to behold amongst the guests a number of that same upstart or *parvenu* class to which the Parkses themselves belonged; but I was agreeably disappointed. Elegantly dressed ladies and fashionable gentlemen, belonging to the higher sphere, were present. A first glance however showed me that there was a considerable nuber of foreigners amongst the male guests: but I learnt in the course of the evening that these were *atthches* and secretaries belonging to the different Embassies to the British Court. I was surprised therefore to find that Mr. and Mrs. Parks possessed so fashionable a range of acquaintances. I had yet to learn that money is in itself an immense power,—a talisman a loadstone—a magnet of irresistible attraction,—that many a *parvenu* is visited for the sake of his splendid suppers and choice wines, while he egotistically fancies that the motive is friendship towards himself—or, again, that those whose necessities and extravagancies place them at the mercy of the money-lender, are compelled to show the same deference to his invitations as they would display to the "royal commands" of the sovereign.

The rooms speedily filled; and Mrs. Parks had whispered in my ear no idle boast when she gave me to understand that she expected at least a hundred and twenty or thirty guests. She retained me near her all the ealier part of the evening; and I was grateful, because I had no lady companion to be my *chaperone*. I knew that St. Clair was to be present: I had seen him every day since the adventures recorded in the preceding chapter: he had told me that Mr. Parks called upon him at his club, and that Mr. Parks had sent him an invitation. He had said nothing more to me on the *one* subject which I was so anxious to avoid; it was only in the presence of the Normans he had seen me—and his demeanour had been that of courteous and friendly respect.

I was sitting with Mrs. Parks at the extremity of the principal saloon, near the door—and she was just observing that it was time for the dancing to commence—when the footman announced in the usual loud tone "Lady Lilla Essendine."

I was immediately struck by a name—or rather a combination of names, which seemed to me as pretty as they were singular—when I was still more deeply impressed by the appearance of the lady herself. She was not more than one or two and twenty, and surpassingly beautiful. She was a blonde of the most perfect description. Her light hair can only be depicted as flaxen mingled with pale amber, but with that rich gloss upon it which generally belongs only to the auburn hue. It was of remarkable luxuriance: but never upon a whiter neck or shoulders did clustering curls of rolling tresses fall. Her complexion was absolutely dazzling. Hypercriticism might have pronounced her to be too fair, because not even on her cheeks was there the delicate relief of a roseate tinge. And yet she was not of a sickly nor insipid whiteness; the skin had an animation and a polish which almost supplied the place, so to speak, of the blushing glow of health. Her eyes were large and of a beautiful blue,—the lashes being of a rich brown which as well as the brows, were consequently many, many shades

darker than the ... er lips were of a vivid vermilion: the teeth were like pearls. Her profile was slightly acquiline, but yet not prominently chiselled.

There was no arching of the neck: it was a straight alabaster column, on which the head sat with dignity, rather than with a graceful bending of its snowy pillar. Still there was no deficiency of elegance in the general effect: it was at statuesque carriage of the head, neck, and bust, which had something queenly in it. The burst itself was supero,—its grand contours being revealed by the low ball dress of richest Honiton lace. She was tall; and her entire symmetry was adjusted to a blendings of the proportions of the Hebe and the Sylph.

Such, at the first glance, was the appearance of Lady Lilla Essendine Methought she was proud,—poud of her rank and beauty, and perhaps her wealth,—until she spoke to Mrs. Parks, who hastened forward to receive her. Then nothing could exceed the gracious affability with which her ladyship addressed the lawyer's wife; so that my first impression being suddenly dispelled, I felt the next moment that I already liked her. Mrs. Parks introduced me; and Lady Lilla Essendine was as cordial and amiable to myself as she had shown herself towards her hostess. Mr. Parks now came forward, and gave his arm to her ladyship to conduct her to a seat.

The dancing immediately afterwards commenced: and Mrs. Parks introduced Count Della Monti, the Sardinian Secretary of Legation, to me as a partner. Just before the quadrille was finished, I perceived Captain St. Clair enter the room. His left arm was still in a sling:—indeed, I should observe that the impression remained upon my mind that he had been much more seriously wounded than he was willing to admit. He was, as usual, elegantly dressed; and on this entrance he was immediately surrounded by half-a-dozen noblemen and gentlemen who did not happen to be dancing, and who evidently regarded St. Clair as the male star of the evening.

Lady Lilla Essendine was dancing opposite to me, her partner being a young English Baronet, whose name I have forgotten. The moment after I had seen St. Clair enter, I averted my eyes; and my looks happened to fall upon Lady Lilla. I was suddenly started: indeed, for an instant I was so struck that if I had cried out it would have been no wonder; for the expression of her countenance actually affrighted me. Pale though she naturally was, as I have already said, she was now ghastly. And yet the very next instant methought it was a mere delusion on my part: for when, after having shudderingly withdrawn my regards, I looked towards her again, she was smilingly making some observation to her partner. I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own senses; for I thought to myself that if I had really beheld upon her countenance that expression—so painfully, so fearfully indicative of some awful inward torture, either mental or physical-wondrous must be the power which she exercised over her own feelings to be enabled so speedily to regain her self-possession. But there she was, her features all happiness and animation again: so that I could not help saying to myself, "I was mistaken: it was the light which deceived me!"

The dance was almost immediately finished; and after the usual promenade round the saloon, Count

Della Monti conducted me to a seat. When he left me, Captain St. Clair approached; and having shaken me by the hand, he sank into the chair which was next to the one in which I was seated.

"I told you that I should be here, Miss Percy," said Captain St. Clair; "and although feeling very far from well, I would not for the world have missed this opportunity of being in your company."

I could not help gazing fixedly upon his countenance as he thus spoke; and I perceived that he was excessively pale—that he had what might be called a delicate look, as if he had only just left a sick chamber; and then that arm in the sling—Oh! as I caught sight of it, a pang shot through my heart at the idea that a valuable human life had been risked and might have been lost on my account. I have no doubt my features must have expressed sympathy, uneasiness, interest, and gratitude, all blended at the time; and then I observed that the animation of pleasure imparted a slight glow to the previously pale cheeks of St. Clair.

"But what care I for illness—or what care I for the pain resulting from a wound—what care I indeed for the perils that I have encountered, since it was all for your sake?"—and the tone in which St. Clair spoke was full of that deep melodious pathos which he knew so well how to infuse into his language.

With the scene at the theatre in my memory—and recollecting how confused, bewildered, and overpowered by my feelings I had been on that occasion—I was resolved to do all I possibly could to prevent St. Clair from addressing me in a similar strain on the present occasion. I felt that I had sufficiently sacrificed my own feelings on that *other* occasion to avoid the the imputation of ingratitude—and that I could no longer, even to preserve in avoiding that imputation, permit him to recur to a topic that I could not and dared not seriously entertain. Therefore, for the purpose of giving the discourse an immediate turn, I said, "What a remarkably-beautiful woman is Lady Lilla Essendine!"

"Yes," observed St. Clair, with such a carelessness of tone and listless of manner that I was startled as much with astonishment thereat as at the announcement which his words themselves conveyed: "my aunt has always been considered a great beauty."

"Your aunt?" and I gazed upon him in wonderment.

"Oh, yes—she is my aunt," replied St. Clair. "I thought perhaps the Parkses might have told you so."

"I never saw Lady Lilla Essendine before this evening," I responded: "nor did I ever before hear her name mentioned. But is it possible ——"

"It is quite possible for Lady Lilla Essendine to be my aunt *by marriage*," rejoined St. Clair, with a peculiar smile upon his lips, and with that singular expression to which I have before alluded, transciently sweeping over his countenance. "My uncle Sir George Essendine was my mother's brother. He was a General in the army, and a Knight of the Cross and Bath. He was immensely rich—eccentric in his manners, and peculiar in his habits. After having been a widower for many long years, he suddenly took it into his head to marry again. Lady Lilla captivated his fancy; and as she was the portionless daughter of a high-born but poor family—having a title too, you perceive, in her own right—it was considered that her patrician rank was a fair set-off against my uncle's

wealth. As to the discrepancies of age, I shall say little or nothing: they speak for themselves, when I tell you that Lady Lilla was eighteen and Sir George was sixty."

"Was it possible that she loved him?" I ingenuously asked.

"I believe she made him an excellent wife—or at least the world said so:"—but there seemed to be something supercillious, if not absolutely flippant in St. Clair's accents. "He paid the debt of nature about a couple of years back: Lady Lilla went abroad—she has only just returned from the Continent—and indeed only just emerged from her widow's weeds."

"But I have not seen you speak to her," I said; and then I recollected that strange expression which her ladyship's countenance had he struck me as wearing for an instant when St. Clair entered the room.

"Miss Percy," he answered, "there can be no harm in telling you that Lady Lilla detests me. All the world knows that we have been at variance ever since my uncle's death; and the reason is of course palpable enough. Sir George died intestate; and I, as his legal heir took possession of everything."

"Then he had made no provision for his wife?" I observed.

"None whatsoever," answered St. Clair: "for as I have just told you, he died without a will. Her ladyship expected to inherit everything; but she found herself the heiress to nothing. Now, in the first place you may suppose that I was now very well pleased with a match that might possibly have cut me out of all my uncle's wealth; and I had all the more reason to complain of it, because he had promised to make me his heir—he had adopted me at my parents' death—he had put me into the Guards—he had brought me up with the idea that I should be wealthy—and thus he had encouraged me in expensive tastes and habits. All those who knew us can testify whether I was a dutiful nephew or not. I gave him no cause for taking a step which might have had the effect of disinheriting me; and therefore, as a youngman thus situated, I naturally felt somewhat chagrined at the idea of being sacrificed to an old man's suddenly formed caprice for a pretty girl. Not that I ever betrayed this displeasure, nor gave vent to my wounded feelings. On the contrary, I continued dutiful, respectful and obedient to my uncle until the very last. But still Lady Lilla was aware of my aversion to the match. It did not even require much exercise of woman's naturally sharp instinct to penetrate that fact: all circumstances were calculated to strike her with the conviction that it must be so. And therefore she detested me."

"This was by no means a good trait in her character," I observed: and at the same time I could not help admiring the conduct of Edwin St. Clair in having studied to conceal from his late uncle the aversion which he so very naturally entertained for such a match.

"I do not wish to speak ill against my aunt," continued St. Clair, whose tone and manner had gradually subsided from supercilliousness flippancy into seriousness: "indeed I hate saying an unkind word of anyone. Much less, Ellen, would I seek to prejudice you against a lady with whom you may possibly become acquainted—"

"I have already been introduced by Mrs. Parks to Lady Lilla Essendine," I observed; "and I do not hesitate to admit that she impressed me with everything in her favour. She was not exactly condescending—for *that* would imply

that she stooped and unbent in patronising manner; whereas she was most graciously affable and kindly courteous."

"Yes—she is polished and well-bred," remarked St. Clair. "But I have not quite made an end of my story. My uncle's death—which occured suddenly, by the lightning stroke of apoplexy—raised me all in a moment to the possession of some five and twenty thousand a year. Now tell me candidly—was it probable that I should abandon all my rights to the young wife he had chosen and whom he had left a widow behind him? The page of the wildest romance never presented such an illustration of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation. It would not have been simply preposterous. But still I was not altogether selfish; and whatever the world may think—whatever to likewise may think, Ellen! I give myself credit for some little degree of generosity in the course that I pursued. I offered to make a settlement of three thousand a year on Lady Lilla Essendine. Would you believe it? she scorned the proposal! And now can you wonder that I have not accosted her in order to pay my respects? or can you suppose that I entertain any respect at all for one who has given such unmistakable evidences of so rancorous a hatred against me?"

"I am sorry to hear all this," I observed, "for when one has formed a favourable opinion of another one does not like to have that opinion diminished and depreciated. I presume you did not expect to meet Lady Lilla Essendine here to-night?"

"To tell you the truth," answered St. Clair, "I was not altogether very much astonished: for Mr. Parks is her solicitor—"

"Indeed!" I exclaimed: "and now I comprehended wherefore her ladyship should have been so familiar and intimate with Mrs. Parks.

"I ought to tell you," continued St. Clair, "that although Lady Lilla was portionless when she espoused my uncle, yet that a little while after the marriage her godfather died—some wealthy old gentleman whose name I forget—and who felt her fifteen hundred a year in his will. Mr. Parks was one of the executors; and hence his acquaintance with her ladyship. Of course that money was settled at the time upon herself; and it constitutes the income upon which lives."

While Captain St. Clair was giving me these explanations, I frequently glanced furtively across the room, in order to observe where Lady Lilla was seated, and whether she were paying any attention to us. Not once, however, did I notice that she was looking in our direction: she was surrounded by several ladies and gentlemen, with whom she appeared to be conversing most gaily.

"You see, Ellen," continued St. Clair, after a brief pause, "that I have entered confidentially and frankly into all these details with you; and therefore, should your acquaintance with Lady Lilla Essendine grow more intimate—I mean should you meet her beneath this roof and hear her speak to my disparagement—you will not give heed to her vindictive misrepresentations: you will know of what value to estimate them."

"It is not probable that I shall often meet her ladyship, I responded; "for when once a certain event shall have taken place, it is not likely that one of her ladyship's rank and position will condescend to make a friend or companion of me. I begin to understand. Captain St. Clair, what the word thinks of——"

"Ellen, to what do you allude?" he ejaculated; and it was with an

air of the most unfeigned astonishment that he gazed upon me.

"Do you not know," I answered, "that this day fortnight I am—to—to—" and I scarcely knew why I hesitated—"to make me *debut*?"

"Ellen, what change has come over you? what does this mean?" asked St. Clair, with a look of the deepest distress. "Tell me—for God's sake tell me, what am I to understand?"

It was now my turn to contemplate him with amazement; but gradually vague suspicions began to flutter in my mind; and I had a comprehension—though a dim one—of what he meant and of the special subjects to which he was alluding. I grew frightened—and all the more so because his own manner betrayed the evidences of a profound excitement.

"We cannot talk here;" he suddenly said in a voice so altered from its usual tone that it enhanced my terror. "Come!" and with this curtly added invitation, he abruptly rose from his seat and proffered me his arm.

I should observe that we had sat somewhat retired from the rest of the company; our discourse had been carried on in a sufficiently low tone to be only audible to ourselves; and I had no reason for supposing that any one had perceived the excitement which both of us had been betraying for the last few instants. I felt the necessity of coming to an immediate explanation with Captain St. Clair; those vague suspicions to which I have already alluded made me half comprehend how and when I had committed myself—or rather, I should say, by what circumstance my own conduct had been rendered such as to lead St. Clair himself into error as to my sentiments with regard to him. Anxious therefore to explain away those impressions, I accepted his arm; and he led me into the refreshment room. This was a spacious apartment, with a large table at one extremity, where several neatly attired servant-maids were dispensing lemonade, negus, ices, and other refreshments to those guests who required them. St. Clair led me to a seat at the opposite extremity, and as the band in the grand saloon struck up at the moment for another dance, the loungers in the refreshment-room quickly sped away thither. St. Clair and I therefore remained alone as it were: for the servant-girls at the other end of the spacious apartment were now busy in the arrangements of the table.

"Ellen," he said, in a low voice, but which was tremulously clear, "is it possible that I could have misunderstood you, or that you could have misunderstood me at the theatre the other night? for I know you too well to believe for an instant that you would be guilty of a heartless coquetry. Indeed, I would not insult you by such a suspicion!"

"Yes—there must have been some serious misunderstanding," I answered, quivering with nervous agitation: "and, oh! Captain St. Clair, I shall be very, very unhappy if through any folly or inadvertance on my part——But no!" I suddenly interrupted myself, as I regained my presence of mind: "I merit not the reproach of either folly or inadvertence; and as for coquetry, I am incapable of it. But I was so shocked with the idea of that duel——the spectacle of your injured arm produced such effect upon me—and there were other reasons—other feelings indeed—in a word, Captain St. Clair, my brain was in a whirl—I was not the mistress of myself—and as heaven is my wit-

ness, I scarcely comprehended all that you said to me at last!".

"Is this possible, Ellen?" and St. Clair looked at me with an earnestness as if to penetrate into all the purposes of my soul and fathom its very depths.

"It is true, Captain St. Clair?" I responded, steadily meeting that gaze for a sufficient time to prove my sincerity—though my looks sank beneath it, as the blush of confusion rose up to my cheeks.

"But one word. Ellen!—one word!" said St. Clair, in a feverish state of the most anxious suspense. "Am I an object of indifference to you?"

"An object of indifference, Captain St. Clair can never be," I replied; "for he has laid me under too many obligations. Gratitude has engendered friendship—"

"Friendship? O Ellen, that is a cold word!" he interrupted me; "and after all that I had hoped—all that I had fancied—all that I had believed—it falls like ice upon my heart! Good heavens, under what a delusion have I been labouring? The other night I spoke as delicately and considerately as I could; for I did not choose to have the appearance of ungenerously availing myself of the little services I rendered you, in order to urge my own suit. But you gave me to understand that you would be mine—that you would renounce all idea of going upon the stage—that our engagement for the present was to be kept a secret until the requisite arrangements—"

"Captain St. Clair," I interrupted him, "you know not how ineffable is the pain which your words occasion me! Alas, I feel that they are indeed only too true! I now comprehend it all!—that which was before dim, hazy, and obscure, has become light and transparent. I am shocked at the error which has occurred; and though innocent—Oh! God knows, that I am innocent of any wilful deception or dissimulation!—yet do I blame myself—I could weep in very anger, vexation, and despair at my own weakness and absence of self-command!"

"But it is impossible, Ellen, that you can plunge me into such misery!" said St. Clair vehemently; "impossible that you can cast down and break the golden bowl of hope which you yourself placed in my hands!—or that you can all in a moment extinguish the lustre of that ineffable star on which my adoring gaze has been fixed! Say not that you will do it, Ellen!—admit that things have gone too far! Some days have elapsed since that conversaion at the theatre—I have seen you daily—and if, in consequence of the Norman's presence, I touched not upon the subject, it was because of that agreement of secrecy—"

"Captain St. Clair, listen to me!" I interrupted him: and again I was armed with all my self-possession. "Deeply, deeply do I deplore the misunderstanding which has occurred, and which must even tend to place my conduct in a peculiar—aye, almost indelicate light—unless you in your generosity give me credit for the sincerity of my present explanations. And pray remember that a sense of gratitude in the first instance induced me to listen the other night to language which otherwise I should have suffered you to perceive was disagreeable. Now at length let everything be intelligible! Pray suffer me to regard you as a friend!—pray continue to honour me with your friendship!—but on the *one* subject let nothing more be said!"

St. Clair listened with every appearance of the deepest distres, and

infinitely was I pained by the expression which his countenance wore. Then all of a sudden I observed that strange—that peculiar—that almost affrighting look take possession of his features—that look to which I have before alluded, and which it did one harm to behold!

"Ellen, he said, clutching me by the wrist so forcibly that for an instant I could have shrieked out with the pain, "tell me, once and for all, is it impossible that you can become mine?"

The service he had rendered me in the adventure of Colonel Bellew—the duel he had fought—the wound which he had received—the indisposition which had followed—the sincerity of that love which was proved by the offer of his hand to one so humble, so obscure, so poor as I—and the delusion of hope in which my own conduct, though so involuntary and so innocent, had cradled him—all these considerations swept like a whirlwind through my mind; and for an instant the purposes of my soul were utterly giving way—my fortitude was melting into thinnest vapour—my self-possession was sinking like a thaw when the sun is up. But the next instant I was again the mistress of myself; my sense of duty became paramount; and along the vista of distance the countenance of my cousin Harry appeared to be looking with the saddest expression of reproach upon me, until all in a moment the handsome brown eyes appeared to light up with joy as the resolve grew strong in my own heart. And thus was it that even with emphasis did I find myself nerved to breathe the response to St. Clair's question—and that response was conveyed in the word "Impossible!"

St. Clair gazed upon me for a few instants with a look the indescribable reproachfulness and anguish of which struck like the sense of a calamity or a crime upon my heart. Then he slowly rose from his seat, and said in a deep, scarcely audible tone, "Farewell, Ellen; farewell for ever!"

I was petrified with the idea of having perpetrated some enormous ingratitude towards one who had perilled his life for me; and I could not have given utterance to a word even if I had wished to speak. St. Clair moved away; and as he reached the door of the apartment she stopped and turned for an instant; then the next moment he disappeared from my view—leaving me still stupefied beneath the influence of that last sad and reproachful look.

CHAPTER X.

LADY LILLA ESSENDINE.

FOR several minutes I sat as if in the midst of a dream—in a sort of consternation and bewilderment which I cannot possibly explain. But slowly into my mind came the reflection that I had done my duty—that there really was no ingratitude in refusing to bestow my hand where I could not give my heart—but that it would be most dishonourable and improper on my part to wed where I could not love. And again—oh! again did imagination depict my cousin's handsome brown eyes looking upon me with joyous approval along the vista of distance!

Composing my feelings and my countenance as well as I was able, I passed into the grand saloon for the purpose of seeking the companionship of Mrs. Parks. I could not, however, find her; and I sat down on a low velvet-covered ottoman,

which was in a sort of nook, inasmuch as the spot was concealed from the general view by the high back of a magnificent chair. There I fell into a profound reverie—thinking of all that had occurred, but more and more satisfied with the course which I had adopted, notwithstanding that I was still deeply pained at the misconception into which St. Clair had fallen—the false hopes it had given him—and the distress occasioned by the destruction of the vision he had built up.

I had been sitting for several minutes in that spot, which was at first so retired,—when I gradually became aware that voices were now speaking near me; and my ear caught that of Lady Lilla Essendine.

"Count Della Montil is evidently enamoured of that beautiful girl with whom he was just now dancing. And no wonder! for she is certainly the *belle* of the assemblage."

These were the words which Lady Lilla Essendine was uttering at the moment: and immediately afterwards Count Della Monti said, in a tone which showed that he was smiling, "Your ladyship forgets that I am married: or else, indeed ——"

"But where is this charming creature?" inquired another masculine voice, speaking with a strong foreign accent. "I shall request Mrs. Parks to introduce me, that I may have the pleasure of dancing the next quadrille——"

"I saw her just now in company with Captain St. Clair, replied Lady Lilla. "And between ourselves," she continued, adopting a tone of mysterious confidence, "I am very sorry for it. It strikes me that Captain St. Clair is paying his address in that quarter: but Miss Percy has yet to learn his true character; and as I have conceived a great affection for her, although we have not as yet exchanged more than half a dozen words, I shall feel it my duty——"

"Indeed!" interrupted a voice, which I recognised to be Della Monti's; "I never yet heard anything prejudicial to St. Clair. I have been some years in England, and know him well——"

"Are you ignorant of the fact that there is a relationship between himself and me," asked Lady Lilla; "and that therefore I may perhaps know something more of him—I mean in his private character?"

I can scarcely explain what sentiment it was which inspired me at the moment,—whether it were that I did not choose any longer to be an unseen listener to a discourse which regarded myself—or whether it were that after all St. Clair had told me, I felt indignant at hearing his character thus run down by one who I fancied ought in justice to speak far otherwise of him: but certain it is that I suddenly rose up from my seat. I thus emerged as it were from behind the back of the very chair in which Lady Lilla had seated herself, and whence she was addressing some three or four foreign *attaches* who had grouped themselves about her. My presence was not instantaneously perceived; and I was beginning to move away from the spot in order to seek another part of the room, when Lady Lilla, catching sight of me, started up and said, "Miss Percy, where have you been? You were just now the object of our conversation——"

"I know it, my lady," I answered but I was an unintentional listener;"—and then, full of confusion, I was hastening away, when Lady Lilla caught me by the arm.

"If you listened—if you overheard

what we said," she whispered with rapidity, "I owe you some explanations, and I must give them."

Having thus spoken, she turned for an instant, and gracefully inclined her head towards the foreigners, as much as to request that they would excuse her for so abruptly leaving them.

"Come with me Miss Percy," she said: "there is a room set apart for the display of some very beautiful prints—we shall perhaps find it unoccupied as the dancing is about to recommence."

I suffered Lady Lille Essendine to lead me to that room to which she had alluded, and, as she had predicted, we found it unoccupied. She closed the door, and was about to address me—when I immediately said, "No explanations are requisite, Lady Lilla; for I can assure you that there is nothing between myself and Captain St. Clair which renders it needful for me to seek information concereing him."

For a moment her ladyship looked astonished: then a smile of incredulity wavered upon her lips; and as it passed away, she said, "Perhaps you may not think that I observed you just now:—but I *did*. You were listening with a more than ordinary attention to what St. Clair was saying: you retired with him to the refreshment-room—a glance which I flung in through the doorway, showed me that you were seated there alone with him—alone, with the exception of the servants; and by the looks and manner of both of you, it was plain to me that your conversation was not that of mere acquaintances. Miss Percy, think not that I am imbued with any unbecoming curiosity: but when I behold a beautiful and amiable young lady such as you, listening to the insidious language of that man—"

"Lady Lilla," I interrupted her, somewhat haughtily, or at least coldly, "it is neither consistent with my ideas of propriety nor with the actual state of circumstances, to listen to a discourse upon Captain St. Clair's character—"

"I understand!" ejaculated her ladyship: "and an expression of mingled scorn and hate for an instant appeared upon her countenance—curling her lips of vivid vermilion, and flashing in her eyes of beautiful blue: but as that expression almost immediately passed away, she took my hand, and with the sweetest, most captivating, most winning smile, said, "Permit me, Miss Percy, to be your friend!—permit me to act as such! I have no difficulty in comprehending that Captain St. Clair has spoken to you prejudicially of me. Yes—I see by your countenance that it is so! But he dares not—no, he dares not—"

Lady Lilla suddenly stopped short; and I can scarcely describe the expression which for a moment swept over her features. It was an expression of mingled hate and defiance—but with some other feeling blended, which I could not then understand—a feeling which however seemed to me to be of a deeper and darker quality. I was almost frightened: for again did I remember the expression of her countenance when St. Clair first made his appearance; and it did me harm to think that one so exquisitely beautiful could have her features actually distorted by the strong passions that surged up within—and that one, who in her ordinary moments had the face of an angel, could with those eyes and lips, and those perfect contours of profile, take the aspect of a fiend.

"Miss Percy," she continued, "pardon this emotion: but if you, knew all that I know— And you

must know it! for I see that St. Clair is weaving his spells around you; and though you may as yet have escaped their influence—though you may be even to a certain extent unconscious that these fascinations are at work to enmesh you—yet be not too confident!—and at all events suffer yourself to be placed upon your guard! I declare unto you that my only object is to serve you as a friend!"

There was something so apparently sincere—something which I believed to be so candidly earnest in Lady Lilla's look and language, that I lost sight of the injunction of St. Clair not to heed what fell from her lips. Besides, I must confess that though I considered everything between myself and St. Clair to be utterly at an end, as indeed I wished it to be,—yet the conversation was now assuming a sort of fearful interest. I therefore listened, and lingered in the room.

"Captain St. Clair," continued Lady Lilla, "conceals beneath that exquisite polish of manner a heat capable of every atrocity. Believe me that it is so! Perhaps he has told you that I hate him; perhaps he has said this in order to account for the fact that we spoke not to each other when we accidentally met here to-night. But if I detest him it is on account of that wickedness of which he has been guilty, and which has come to my knowledge. Listen, Miss Percy—listen, my dear Ellen; for we must be friends; and when you come to know me better you will wonder that even for an instant you could have mistrusted my motives—as I see that you have done."

"But I assure your ladship," I interrupted her—for it struck me I had no right to give way to the curiosity which had seized upon me—"there is nothing between myself and Captain St. Clair."

"Nothing?" she said, again looking at me incredulously. "Oh, then! there *has* been? Perhaps you have rejected him! Ah! that tell-tale blush confirms the idea! My dear Ellen, even though St. Clair should affect to bid you farewell for ever, yet rest assured that he will return!—you are too beautiful and too innocent for him to desist from the hope of conquest! You must be put upon your guard, for fear lest——pardon the expression!——for fearlest, I say, you should become his victim!"

I shuddered as these words were uttered with the strongest emphasis that the naturally-musical voice of Lady Lilla could impart to her language; and that fearful feeling of curiosity which had already seized upon me, now deepened.

"Yes, his victim! I repeat!" continued Lady Lilla; "his victim! I could tell you a tale ——But I will not now! No—I would not shock you to such an extent! But still I must tell you enough to convince you of my sincerity, and to prove to you *his* consciousness of darkest, deepest villany. Should he seek you again—should he breathe the language of love in your ear—make use of a talisman which will send him in affright and in horror from you. There is that camelia in your hair——"

"The camelia?" I ejaculated, astonished at what appeared to be the sudden flying-off at a tangent from a subject fearful serious to one ludicrously frivolous in comparison.

"Attend to me!" continued Lady Lilla Essendine, still with a most impressive earnestness. "If St. Clair should again accost you with the language of love this evening, take that camelia from your hair—

present it to him suddenly—and demand of him, '*Do you recognise the symbol* ?'—Or if at any other time or place he should henceforth accost you, snatch up a flower from the nearest vase if it be in a room—or pluck one, if it be in the garden or the field—and while presenting it put the same question! Oh: you will judge by the effect whether there be not some ghastly meaning attached to it!—a meaning which would shock your soul with the idea of espousing one whom such a sinister mystery enshrouds!"

I listened with a sort of consternation to this singular language,—a language which appeared to be filled with the wildest horror of a romance. I longed to ask questions—but dared not: there was something in the whole scene which filled the mind with the stupor of awe.

"No more at present, my dear Ellen!" said Lady Lilla Essendine. "And remember—it is under the seal of inviolable secrecy that I have been speaking! Not a syllable of all this to any of your friends! You have now the power to put St. Clair to the test; and if he should persecute you with his addresses, you have a talisman to make him flee from your presence. Compose your looks—compose your feelings likewise—and let us return to the ballroom."

Lady Lilla ceased speaking; but she lingered in the apartment for a few minutes, in order, no doubt, to afford me leisure to tranquilize myself. I felt the necessity to do so to the utmost of my power: for at any instant other guests might enter the room where the scene was occurring. I issued forth with her ladyship; and on returning to the saloon, swept my glances around to ascertain whether Edwin St. Clair was still present. But he was nowhere to be seen; and I felt relieved,—for Lady Lilla's strange, wild and I may even say terribly-mysterious language had filled me with the deepest misgivings as to her nephew's character. Mrs. Parks accosted her ladyship and myself, and requested us both to dance, partners being at hand for the purpose. Lilla flung upon me a look to enjoin compliance; and I complied—for I felt as if I were an automaton under the influence of some strange spell which she was enabled to wield over me. The evening passed away without any other incident worthy of mention; and Mr. Parks's carriage conveyed me in safety back to Hunter Street.

When, on the following day I reflected on everything that had occurred, I was bewildered what to think. It was true that St. Clair was no object of the heart's interest to me: but still I could not possibly help thinking of him in connexion with the events that had taken place and the strange mysterious language I had heard. Could I believe that he was so wicked as had been represented?—or, on the other hand, was I to come to the conclusion that Lady Lilla's statements emanated from a diabolic malignity? I knew not how to shape my conjectures; but most sincerely did I hope that I should see no more of St. Clair—while I was equally resolved to avoid the society of Lady Lilla Essendine.

In the afternoon of that same day which succeeded the ball, Juliet Norman, on returning from rehearsal, said to me, "Have you heard about our poor friend Melissa?" She is exceedingly ill—"

"Ill?" I ejaculated, much pained by the intelligence. "How long has she been ill—that poor creature!"

"I only just heard it at the theatre; and if I had time," continued

Juliet, "I would go at once to see her: but the dinner-hour is at hand ——"

"I will go!" I said; "my time is at present my own. Where does she live?"

Juliet wrote down the address; and she bade me say everything kind to Melissa on her account, as well as to convey a promise that she would call upon the invalid on the morrow. I hastened to put on my bonnet and mantle; and a hackney-coach being summoned, I proceeded to the address indicated on the slip of paper which Juliet had given me. It was rather a poor street, at no very great distance from the Normans' dwelling: and on alighting from the hackney-coach, my summons at the front door of the house was answered by a dirty drab of a servant-of-all-work.

"Miss Harrison," I said, "lives here—does not?"

"Yes, Miss: but she be ill abed," replied the domestic, "Second-floor—front," she added, thus curtly indicating the room to which I was to ascend.

I mounted a narrow staircase, covered with oil-cloth instead of carpet: and on reaching the door of the front room on the second floor, I knocked gently. Melissa's voice, feebly, bade me enter: and I passed in. The chamber in which I now found myself was indifferently if not poorly furnished; and it had a somewhat slovenly appearance. Garments were scattered upon the floor; and there was a total absence of that neatness which I should have expected to be associated with dwelling of Melissa Harrison. A number of theatrical portraits were hung to the walls; and one or two drawers being half open, afforded glimpses of muslin dresses covered with tinsel.

Melissa herself lay in bed: her countenance was wan and sickly, with blueish circles round the eyes—so that it seemed as if death's finger had already touched her face. A smile of grateful satisfaction appeared upon her lips as I entered the room; and the tears starting from her eyes, she exclaimed, "Oh, this is indeed most kind of you!"

"How long have you been ill, my dear Melissa?" I asked, as I pressed her hand and sat down by the side of the couch.

"For several days, Ellen," she responded—"ever since that conversation which you and I had together. It affected me more than it did you at the time—because *you* could not enter feelingly into its spirit—whereas I had all the experiences—"

"Oh, I can assure you it made its impression upon me!" I interrupted her. "But why did you not send to tell the Normans and myself that you were ill? Did you not know," I asked, in a voice of gentle reproach, "that we should hasten to see you? Here are flowers which I have brought to give the room a cheerful appearance; and Juliet will come early to-morrow morning, to bring you jellies and other delicacies—"

"I should have sent to you, Ellen," answered Melissa, with a slight flush now rising upon her previously wan cheeks; "but—but—my abode is not such as I have any reason to be proud of. The Normans believe I am better lodged; and I gave you also to understand in the discourse which we had the other day, that pecuniary circumstances had ceased to be the source of any unhappiness on my part—"

"I should have flown to see you, Melissa," I responded, "even if you had lived in a garret! But now that I am here, pray tell me what I

can do for you. Have you a doctor?"

"Yes," replied Melissa; and then, as the tears trickled down her pale cheeks, she added, "And he says that I am very far from well: he tells me that I shall never be able to go upon the stage again—it would be death to me! O Ellen, I know—I feel that I am in a decline: consumption has seized upon its victim! I shall perish soon—the grave is yawning to receive me—and I who have so much to live for!"

The unhappy young woman now burst into a perfect agony of weeping; and bending over the pillow, I said all I could to console her.

"Do not give way to these apprehensions," I whispered; "you are young—and the strength of your constitution may assert itself. Oh, yes! it will—believe me, it will! You are too much alone—and dark thoughts get possession of you. You ought to have sent for your friends. But now that Juliet and I know you are ill, we will come to you often—we will watch by the side of your couch—we will take our turns in being your companions—we will do all we can to comfort and make you well."

Melissa took my hand, and pressed it to her lips. Her tears continued to flow forth freely: her bosom heaved with emotions which appeared to be suffocating her.

"Tell me, my dear friend," I said, deeply affected, "is there anything I can do for your comfort or solace? Methinks there is something upon your mind—"

"Ellen," said Melissa, "sit down by my side again—and I will give you my confidence. But to you alone must this tale be told—and to no one else: for you will afford me your sympathy—a sympathy which I am not sure of receiving from others!"

"Oh! from me, Melissa, you shall receive sympathy!" I exclaimed: "and if having told me your tale, whatsoever it may be, you require any service done—if in any way my poor assistance may avail you—rest assured that it shall be rendered!"

Again did Miss Harrison press my hand to her lips with the most fervent gratitude; and she moistened it with her tears. I saw that though in one sense anxious to make me her confidante, yet in another she was struggling against some different and deeper feeling, as if with the reluctance arising from shame.

"Ellen," she began, as a blush again tinged her cheeks, and heightening into hectic spots, remained impressed there like fever's or consumption's emblems; "I spoke to you the other day of the miseries to which many of my profession are exposed; and I hinted how these miseries enhanced the power of temptations. Left an orphan at an age when the care of parents was so necessary—Oh, so necessary! I experienced all those miseries, and became surrounded with all those temptations. Long, long did I endure the former and combat against the latter; but the first became too poignant and the latter too irresistible. For when poverty, like a gaunt spectre, stares you in the face—when whichever way you turn, it meets your eyes—when you behold it on the right hand and feel it touching you on the left—when it circles about you, hems you in as it were, breath its icy breath upon you by day, and lays its glacial hand on you by night to freeze the very marrow in your bones,—Oh, *then* it is that crime itself becomes gilded an resplendent if it only constitute the means of procuring bread! And

then too, Ellen," continued Melissa, in a voice that grew ominously low, and with the hectics spots deepening upon her cheeks,—"and *then* too, as the poor girl, driven to desperation, descends from her ice cold attic into the street, starvation having wrought up her brain to frenzy—when, I say, she stretches forth her hand in the hope that God may put alms into it, the tempter comes and drops gold upon that palm—and then all is over! The poor child of poverty has become the lost one of crime!"

"O Melissa!" I murmured, shuddering with an intense horror; "what dreadful things are these which you are telling me!"

"Ah! my dear, dear friend," said the unfortunate young woman, "I am shocked at the necessity which compels me to reveal all this. But still more am I shocked that to you—so pure, so good, so innocent—such revelations should be made! Yet bear with me—listen, dearest Ellen! My tale, though sorrowful, is not long. It is the common history of a woman's fall; the incidents are the same with thousands and thousands and tens of thousands. Yes—I fell: I became the victim, not of my own willing levity—not of my own unbridled passions—for as there is a heaven above us, Ellen, I had the same love of rectitude which renders you brighter even in your virtue than you are in your beauty! But to die morally, or to die suicidally,—these were the alternatives: and, Oh, my God! I could not lay violent hands upon myself—I could not plunge into the dark stream in search of that pearl, Oblivion, which is said to lie in the profundities of the Lethean waters! Therefore I died the moral death: I severed the golden cord which held me bound to the portals of virtue's temple. Thus I fell, Ellen: I became the mistress of one who vowed that he loved me, and that he would ever treat me with kindness!"

Melissa's voice sank tremulously until it became absorbed in the suffocation of sobs and tears; and for awhile she wept anew. I continued to be profoundly affected: my own voice was choked: but in order to express my sympathy, I pressed her hand warmly in my own.

"Few were acquainted with my shame," proceeded Melissa; "for it *was* veritable shame to me, and not a willingly-accepted infamy to be paraded with recklessness or with hardihood. Therefore I did my best to conceal my actual position from those who knew; and at the theatre it was never suspected. The Norman knew it not: or else I should not have subsequently been received into their circle. You may perhaps say, Ellen, that I was wrong, while knowing myself infamous, to intrude where propriety was maintained. But, Oh; who in this world will proclaim their own guilt? who will voluntarily tear off the mask and expose the hideousness which lies beneath? No, no! it is not consistent with human nature! And if not even to Juliet Norman would I now confess all that I am revealing unto you, it is because she might feel indignant that I, the polluted, have mingled in the sphere of her parents' household. But let me continue my narrative. A child was the issue of that frailty of mine,—a sweet infant girl on whom I bestowed my own name. My connection with her father has some time ceased. The instant I attained a sufficient degree of success to be enabled to commend permanent engagements, with a salutary furnishing a competence, I severed necessity's iron bond which had hitherto bound me to a career of shame: I severed it—Oh! far more

readily than I had snapped the golden one which at the first bound me to the portals of virtue's temple!" Melissa again paused; and as I bent over her, I kissed her cheek, saying, "Great was the atonement you thus made for the past!"

"Heaven bless you, Ellen, for that soothing assurance!" exclaimed Melissa, in a tone of indescribable fervour. "My child has been well cared for," she continued; "and if I live thus poorly in comparison with the salary which I receive, it is because I have done all this for my little Melissa. She is in the care of a worthy couple in the northern suburbs of London, and who have had charge of her from her birth. Oh! did I not proclaim just now that I had so much to live for?—and my God! I am to die! With all my striving—with all my economies, I have been unable to save aught beyond a few pounds; and these, God help me! are likely to slip away during my illness, if it be prolonged. Ellen, it is the thought of my child that fills me with anguish, and that will prevent me from getting well even if otherwise I could! I have written a letter to the father of that child; I have implored him to do something that, by making a certain provision for her, will lighten my heart of more than half its cares. I was perplexing myself with the thought of how to ensure the safe conveyance of this letter, and how it might be backed by the personal appeal of some kind and generous friend,—when you, Ellen, made your appearance. It was God who sent you: for I know that you will undertake this task for me!"

"I will, Melissa—Oh, I will with cheerfulness!" I exclaimed: "and God grant that I may succeed for your sake, and for that of the poor child in whom I myself now feel so deeply, deeply interested!"

"Alas, Ellen," proceeded Miss Harrison, "it pains—it grieves me to be compelled to confess that *he*—the father of my child—is indeed one who may require to be entreated. Much deceived was I in his character——"

"Speak no more upon that point," I interrupted Melissa; for I saw that the subject caused the acutest anguish. "Rest assured I will do all that woman can in the fulfilment of so sacred a mission! And let me depart at once, so that if I should be fortunate enough to return with good tidings, you may be all the more speedily relieve from a state of suspense."

Miss Harrison drew from beneath her pillow the letter which she had written; and as she placed it in my hand, she reiterated her fervid thanks for the part that I was performing towards her. I bade her be of good cheer, and issued forth from the house. On gaining the street, I looked at the direction of the letter, and found that it was addressed to Alfred Peters, Esq., Duke Street, Manchester Square. This being at some considerable distance from Melissa's abode, I took a hackney coach to proceed to my destination. On alighting at the house—which was in a very good street, and in a fashionable quarter of the town—my summons at the front door was answered by a female servant, who had a somewhat brazen look, and who surveyed me in no very respectful manner. I inquired if Mr. Peters were at home: she answered in the affirmative,—adding "I suppose you have an invitation or appointment?"

Methought there was something flippant, if not altogether insolent, in the servant's speech; and now for the first time it struck me that there might be some impropriety in the mission which I had undertaken

on Miss Harrison's behalf. Until this instant such an idea had not occurred to me; for during the ride my thoughts had been totally absorbed in the tale I heard, and in the hope of being enabled to benefit one who had suffered so deeply. However, I had now gone too far to retreat, even if such were my wish after the promises I had made Melissa to conduct the matter to the best of my ability.

"I have neither invitation nor appointment," was the reply I gave to the female-servant's question; and summoning all my fortitude to my aid, I spoke with a calm dignity. "I wish to see Mr. Peters upon a subject of some importance. I have a letter for him, which I should prefer delivering into his own hand."

"What name shall I announce?" inquired the woman, now contemplating me with a little more respect but still in a manner as if she were at a loss to make up her mind what to think of me.

"It is no use to give any name," I answered, "as I am a total stranger to Mr. Peters; and I come solely on behalf of another."

"Have the kindness to remain here for a moment," said the servant: then after a few instants' hesitation and reflection, she added, "No! Perhaps, all things considered, it will be better for you to walk up and see the—I mean Mr. Peters at once."

She led the way up a staircase to the first-floor landing—on reaching which the sounds of female voices laughing merrily, met my ears. I concluded that Mr. Peters must be a married man; and now I was again stricken by an unpleasant reflection: for how could I possibly acquit myself of so delicate a mission in the presence of a wife, who must no doubt be utterly ignorant of his irregular proceedings? Accordingly, stopping short, I hastily whispered to the servant, "It is not in the presence of his family that I wish to see Mr. Peters."

The woman gave a strange subdued laugh, between a chuckle and a giggle—a laugh which I by no means liked; and a species of terror took possession of me. I would have questioned her father—I would have even made my retreat, but it was too late. She flung open the door of a back room, saying, "Here is a young lady, sir, who wishes to see you."

I advanced mechanically; and just as I crossed the threshold, the first object that struck me was the form of a gentleman disappearing by mean of a door on the other side of the apartment. It was with a sort of rush that he had thus beaten a precipitate retreat; and the impression instantaneously conveyed to my mind was that I had thus caught a glimpse of Edwin St. Clair. At the same moment I perceived that there were two females in the room; and the coarse unlady-like laughter which burst from their lips, completed my utter bewilderment and confusion. A dizziness seized upon my brain—a sudden film came over my sight: it appeared as if I were all in a moment enveloped in a mist; and I mechanically handed Melissa's letter to a gentleman who at first had his back turned towards me, but who now rose from the table and suddenly accosted me. An ejaculation burst from his lips: a half-stifled shriek pealed forth from mine;—for I now recognised Colonel Bellew!

CHAPTER XI.

COLONEL BELLEW'S HOUSE.

THAT shriek was produced by a sense of danger: but it was the next moment succeeded by one of mingled disgust, shame, and indignation at the thought that I had been introduced to a scene which it was not fitting for a young maiden to gaze upon. The room was well furnished: there were shelves containing handsomely-bound books—there were pictures in splendid frames: and I recollect also that I caught sight of a uniform, as well as of a sword and pistols. The table was spread for breakfast: and there were champagne bottles upon it. The two young women who were present were negligently apparelled; and their looks were immodest and brazen. The Colonel himself was in a morning *negligé*—a floweredsilk dressing-gown confined at the waist by means of a rich cord with heavy tassels. At the side of the table nearest to the inner door, was a vacant chair: a half-emptied champagne glass was also at the place which a minute back had been occupied by the individual who took to so precipitate a flight, and who had struck me as being St. Clair.

"What? Miss Percy!" exclaimed Colonel Bellew. "Is it possible—"

"Sir," I interrupted him, now feeling myself nerved by all my courage and sustained by all my feminine dignity, "if that letter be intended for yourself, read it: but if I have made a mistake, I beg you to return it to me."

Having thus spoken I stepped out upon the landing, from which the female servant had disappeared; and I placed myself in such a manner as to be hidden from the view of the two brazen girls that were seated at the table. Colonel Bellew glanced at the superscription of the letter: and immediately came forth upon the landing, closing the door after him. He was in no way confused or embarrassed in my presence: but on the other hand there was nothing insolent nor disrespectful in his looks.

"Yes, Miss Percy," he said: "this letter is for me—and I know the handwriting. Will you have the kindness to walk in here?"

Thus speaking, he threw open the door of a front drawing-room: a glance showed me that the windows looked upon the street, and that one of them was open. There was consequently no danger to be anticipated: for at the slightest offer of insult, a scream from my lips would at once bring succour. As to remaining in the house at all, and in the presence of one from whom I had received such outrageous treatment, on a former occasion, at another place—I must beg the reader to bear in mind that I considered I had a sacred mission to perform on behalf of one who might be perhaps stretched upon her death-bed—on behalf too of a young child who might speedily be motherless: and these were paramount considerations with me.

I therefore entered the room—Colonel Bellew following me. He politely indicated a chair: but this I declined to accept: and he proceeded to peruse the letter. I glanced at his countenance ascertain if there were hope for poor Melissa; but I must confess that in my own mind I had little faith in the success of the very unpleasant mission I had undertaken. It was with a cold calmness indeed I must almost say with indifference that the Colonel read the missive and then looking at me, he said "Is she—Melissa I mean is she so very, very ill?"

"She believes herself to be in a decline," I answered; "and the surgeon has prohibited her from ever returning to the stage, even if she should rise from this sick couch on which she is stretched."

"I will call upon her," said Colonel Bellew; "but in the meantime Miss Percy, I must of course do something in the matter—Perhaps you will suggest—"

"You can well understand, sir," I responded, "that it must be indeed painful for me to linger here one instant more than is necessary: but if I do so, it is only in the performance of a solemnly-undertaken duty. Melissa Harrison is in that feverish and perturbed state of mind to which every moment of suspense brings additional torture, and for which the realization of her last hope would prove the most soothing balm. I beseech you, sir, to allow me to become the bearer of consolatory intelligence. It is for the mother of your child on whose behalf I am pleading!"

"Miss Percy," said Colonel Bellew, now speaking with a deep seriousness, "you shall find that I am prepared to do all that is needful and proper in this distressing case. Indeed, it is sufficient that you have come to plead on Melissa's behalf—"

"No, sir!" I ejaculated, as a sense of former circumstances vividly inspired me: "I beg you will not put it upon *that* foundation. You may easily suppose that had I known whom I was destined to encounter here, and that the letter addressed to Mr. Peters would bring me into the presence of Colonel Bellew, I should have hesitated—"

"Well, Miss Percy, let us not refer to the past," interrupted the Colonel. "I can assure you of my readiness to act becomingly in the present instance. You shall return as the bearer of a substantial proof of my sincerity; and in the course of the day I will consult my solicitor, so that we may best devise the means of making a provision for the child in case anything should happen to Melissa. Have the goodness to await me here a few instants, while I fetch my cheque-book."

Having thus spoken, the Colonel issued from the room, closing the door after him. Despite my previous misgivings, I had now no longer any doubt in his sincerity; and I could not help thinking that whatsoever he might be about to do, was not so much on Melissa's account as it was a sort of atonement for his conduct towards myself.

The room in which I now remained alone was handsomely furnished; it was even characterized by taste and elegance, though nothing indicated that a female genius presided over its appointments. There were vases of flowers upon the tables—but no work-box,—none of those little nick-nacks which indicate the presence of ladies in a house. Nor indeed was this to be wondered at, considering the equivocal company which I had found Colonel Bellew entertaining. Again recurred to my mind the sudden impression made upon it, that it was St. Clair whom I had seen disappearing so abruptly from the other room, as if startled by my presence; but still I could scarcely think that my surmise was correct: for would he now be so intimate with the man with whom he had fought a duel?—would he with all his avowed love for me, court the society of the individual from whose outrageous insolence he had proved my deliverer? And then, too, St. Clair—that man of elegant taste and polished refinement—in the company of those brazen creatures!—was the idea credible? If so,

then truly everything Lady Lilla Essendine had told me concerning him, must be correct; and happy, happy indeed was I to have escaped the beguilement of the language which flowed from his lips!

I was in the midst of these reflections, when the door opened. I looked round—started as if suddenly galvanized: for it was not Colonel Bellew, but St. Clair himself who now made his appearance!"

The conviction that everything I had heard to St. Clair's prejudice was only true, all in a moment became stamped upon my mind; and my cheeks glowed with indignation at the thought that he dared obtrude himself upon my presence bringing with him, as it were, the atmosphere of pollution which he had been breathing in the neighbouring apartment. A sense too of some meditated treachery smote me; but my indignation rose above my fears; and I said, "I perceive, sir, that this is no place for me to linger another moment in!"

That expression, so peculiar and so sinister, to which I have already alluded, rose to Edwin St. Clair's countenance, and assumed an aspect more visibly wicked than ever it had taken before. It appeared as if the fiend which lurked within, was now completely throwing off the mask from behind which it had hitherto only partially peeped forth. I was affrighted: my courage was rapidly ebbing away—and I sprang towards the door.

"You may go, Miss Percy," said St. Clair, in a tone so scornfully withering and so full of satanic defiance that it instantaneously arrested my steps; "but remember that it will be with a ruined character and a reputation irreparably destroyed!"

A shriek went forth from my lips. I felt as if I were in the power of some demon terribly potent to work every species of evil! and I involuntarily clasped my hands in an appealing manner as I turned towards him.

"Do not doubt what I tell you," he continued. "You know the man whom you have met—you have seen the company which he keeps—"

"And, Oh! how is it possible," I exclaimed, "that I find Captain St. Clair in such company?"

"A man goes everywhere," was his coldly-given answer; "and his reputation suffers not. But a woman—Ah! with *her* it is very different!"

The truth of this declaration at once struck me most forcibly; and, Oh! how bitterly did I repent this zealous haste with which I had undertaken Melissa Harrison's errand.

"Oh, Captain St. Clair," I exclaimed; "I have hitherto given you credit for the most generous feelings—for the loftiest magnanimity! Do not, do not misjudge me! Oh, in your own heart you know that I am incapable—But Ah! you can satisfy yourself—you may learn what has brought me hither, even if you be not already aware of it!"

Melissa Harrison's letter was open on the table, where Colonel Bellew had tossed it down: I snatched it up and handed it to St. Clair.

"It is unnecessary," he said: "I know full well, Ellen, that you came hither with no evil purpose—"

"Oh!" I ejaculated: and I was about to give a wildly fervent expression to my gratitude—when I stopped short: I was transfixed with dismay—the blood was turned to ice in my veins, as I encountered the deep fiendish wickedness of the look which sprung up to St. Clair's features.

"Yes," he continued, "I know the purity of your motives; but the

world will judge far otherwise! Now listen to me. As there's a heaven above us, I have loved you—I still love you as never did man love before! I hesitate not to avow that though young in years, I am old in the world's pleasures. To all the fascinations and charms of your sex I am no stranger: but never have I encountered one who has made upon my heart the same impression as yourself. Marriage! I scorned the idea until I learnt to love you. But to *you*, Ellen, I offered my hand: and I swear, as I have a soul to be saved, that I was ready to fulfil my pledge. But you refused me. I bowed my pride so low as to entreat and implore: and still you refused me. Oh! you are the first woman," he exclaimed, with scornful bitterness, "who ever had the power of reducing my heart to despair! Yes—but it was natural; for you were the first of your sex who taught me no longer to deride the romancist's page and the poet's verse in which love is depicted as a deity having sway over every heart. Yes—and you were the first whose beauty cast veritable spells around me, and plunged me into that roseate dream in which one walks as it were with the senses enthralled but with the eyes open! For you, Ellen, I was prepared to make every sacrifice. I myself already worshipped you; and as my bride would I have held you up to the worship of the world also! Ah, and there were moments when I said to myself that the triumphs of oratory which I had as yet achieved when seeking only to gratify a comparatively idle and cold ambition, were as nothing to those which I could accomplish if the need were to be the approval of your looks and your smiles! But all these dreams did you ruthlessly destroy—all these hopes and visions did you dash to the ground!"

St. Clair had gone on addressing me with impassioned vehemence; and when he suddenly ceased, he began pacing to and fro in an agitated manner. I would fain have checked him: I would have implored his mercy and his forbearance: but I could not I was stupefied with affright, as well as enthralled with the indescribly-absorbing interest which belonged to his powerful eloquence. There could be no doubt as to his sincerity. It was the heart that was speaking—no matter how bad the heart itself might be—through the medium of that wildly-poetic language.

"Oh, you rejected me!" continued St. Clair: "and you ought not to be astonished if with such a being as I am, love should have turned to hatred. But it has not as yet—no, as yet it has not! Accident has this day given me the present chance: it has furnished me with one last opportunity. Oh! compel me not speak of coercion—force me not to use the power which your own zealous indiscretion—I mean on Melissa Harrison's behalf—has now given me!"

"Coercion—power—indiscretion?" I vaguely murmured, affrighted at the sense which might be attached to those words.

"Oh! do you not comprehend my meaning?" exclaimed St. Clair, literally stamping his foot with the vehemence of passion. "I love you so deeply—so desperately, Ellen, that I am prepared to resort to any means to make you mine. Yes—if the Enemy of Mankind were to rise up before me at this instant, and to demand the sacrifice of my own soul as the price which I must pay for the possession of your hand, Ellen, I would pay that price!"

"Oh, this is dreadful!" I exclaimed, smitten with an awful sense of

terror; and my limps appeared to be giving way under me.

"Dreadful it may be—but it is not the less true!" replied St. Clair quickly: then advancing to the window he shut it down.

"Let me depart!" I exclaimed, affrighted at a scene which appeared to forbode some terrible calamity for I saw that St. Clair was desperate.

"Yes—go if you will!" he ejaculated. "By heaven! not a door shall be closed against you! But I warn you, Ellen, that if you treat me thus I will have a signal revenge. Have I not just told you that I would sacrifice my very soul for your sake—that I would abandon all my hopes of hereafter for the bliss of the present in making you mine own? And think you therefore that such a love as this will stand upon mere nice scruples? Oh, my love is madness—it is frenzy!—and this hour which is passing is to decide whether it is to prove for my soul a pandemonium or a paradise! Go if you will: but my love shall turn to hatred: and bitter shall be the vengeance it will wreak! Go, Ellen—refuse to become my bride—and ere the sunset of this day all the town shall know that Ellen Percy came to Colonel Bellew's house at a time when he was entertaining two females whose very touch is pollution!"

"O God, to what have I exposed myself!" and I wrung my hands in despair.

"Think you not, Ellen," continued my tormentor, "that it rends also *my* heart with agony to behold you thus afflicted? But what compassion have you upon me? None! none! If you are selfish in your indifference, how much more selfish must not I be in my love! Oh, and I am selfish—and, by heaven, I will compel you to become my bride! Through the fear of very shame will I force you to the altar!—through the dread of a ruined reputation will I drag forth an assent from your lips!"

"Captain St. Clair," I said; now recovering somewhat of my hitherto-lost presence of mind, "is this the language of one who the other day displayed so noble a chivalry and who perilled his life in my behalf?—Ah!"

This ejaculation was wrung from my lips by the circumstance of suddenly perceived that St. Clair no longer wore a sling; whereas on the night of the ball, the day but one previous, he had still worn it, and appeared to be still suffering deeply. He was now gesticulating with that arm as well as with the other: and I was smitten with astonishment at the fact.

"I see that you are surprised—and I comprehend wherefore," he said; and then he added hastily, "But my arm is now well—the wound has heard. Let that matter pass! It is of the present we have to speak. If I were an obscure, an humble, and a fortuneless individual—having to battle my way with the world—you might hesitate to accept me. But I possess a brilliant possession; and I offer to make you the sharer of it. I have wealth;—it is yours. I shall create for myself a proud and lofty name;—its reflection will shine upon you. To descend to the meanest vanity—a vanity which I however despise—I may affirm that my personal appearance is not disagreeable. As for my intelligence—Oh! if you only knew with what contempt and scorn I look around me upon the average intellect of the world, you would admit that there must be some consciousness of superior power on my part! Tell me there.

fore, Ellen Percy, am I unworthy of you ?"

I could not help listening to this long speech, as well as to the preceding ones. It was a torrent of eloquence which overwhelmed me, eloquence so impassioned, so vivid, so irresistible, that it enthralled the senses. It had no fascination of pleasure—but that of its own grand and terrific power. Thus was it painful as the effect of a frightful thunder storm. The strongest feelings were embodying themselves in the strongest language. It was something impossible to cut short by precipitate flight. I felt as if the ocean itself were rolling in around me—fraught with danger—full of menace—but grand, sublime, and terribly awe inspiring ; so that the feet were riveted to the spot and there was no help but to wait involuntarily to be overwhelmed.

"Now you understand me, Ellen" continued St. Clair after only a few instants' pause, during which he was enabled to comprehend and measure the effect his words had produced. "Mine you shall be !—and though I win you by coercion, yet will I surround you with affections such as man never before bestowed upon woman. And, Oh ! you know not how much it is that I am now promising : you cannot estimate the full meaning of my words ! Though no title decorates my name, yet no king upon his throne possesses a prouder spirit than Edwin St. Clair ; Yes—and this hauteur of mine—not a mere vulgar pride, but the loftiest sublimation of which the sentiment is susceptible—all shall be bowed—is bowed—at your feet ! Now, Ellen, I have said more to you than to any living being did I ever breathe before. But a few weeks back, if any one had told me—*me* so coldly cynical in my ideas of the world—*me* so utterly despising everything that is called sentiment—*me* who was the veriest infidel in respect to the deity of love, and the extremist sceptic on the score of his worship, —if anyone had told me that the day would ever come when I was to address woman in this strain, I should have deemed the prophecy an insult, and should have resented it as such. But that day *has* come —it is now present—and I, the infidel, am grown the most infatuated believer in the divine worship of love !"

If in one sense St. Clair's eloquence was a torrent to overwhelm, in another sense it was a subtle web wherewith to enmesh all the senses. My brain was bewildered—my head was losing itself in the confusion of my ideas ; and I had a vague numbing sense of terror lest by obstinacy or refusal on my own part I should draw down some terrific vengeance on my head. My powers of speech were paralyzed : I was under the influence of a spell which I could not possibly shake off. But, Oh ! rest assured, reader, it was not the spell of love !

"Now, Ellen, your decision ?" resumed St. Clair : "for I can endure this suspense no longer. Oh ! need I say more ? Be my bride, dearest—and you shall become the idol of my worship ! The proudest heart in Christendom, though beating in the breast of a civilian, shall be humbled in devotion unto you ! I will not insult your intelligence, nor imply a miserable feminine vanity on your part, by expatiating on the splendours the luxuries, and the elegances of life with which I shall surround you ; but this I may say—that all the happiness which wealth can give shall be enjoyed by you ! And if you love me not now, let this be no scruple in your way : for as the perfume of one flower blends

with that of another, so shall the feelings of our hearts speedily mingle in warm transfusion. Love begets love; and when inchoate in one heart, it fertilises the soil in which the feelings are germinating in another. Oh, you will learn to love me, Ellen——"

"Never?" I exclaimed, an extraordinary impulse being given to my soul as I became thoroughly myself again; for goaded to very desperation, I beheld the necessity of bursting by one bold effect the bonds which terrorism, intimidation, and the power of eloquence had for a period riveted around me.

"Never?" repeated St. Clair staggering beneath this sudden rebuff at an instant when he had evidently thought his triumph was assured.

"No, never!" I ejaculated, "And oh! Captain St. Clair, can you not be chivalrous—can you not be magnanimous? Will you not promise to forbear from taking any advantage of a power which my visit hither may seem to have given you over me?"

"*You* appeal for mercy to me, Ellen," cried St. Clair bitterly,—"you who will show *me* not the slightest particle! Oh, this is intolerable! it is more than enough to make even such a love as mine turn into hatred!"—and never shall I forget how immense was the concentrated wickedness that became expressed in his look at that moment.

"For God's sake spare me!" I said, appealing unto him in very agony. "I cannot become your wife, because I love you not! Oh! my reputation is the only fortune I possess. Take it not away from me! ruin not my good name! It would be an act that sooner or later you must bitterly, bitterly repent."

"Ellen, I am merciless!" responded St. Clair, who was fearfully excited: for his lips were ashy white, and his whole frame was trembling nervously. "Swear to become my bride?"

"Never!" I gasped. "Any sacrifice sooner!"

"Then that sacrifice shall you make!" he exclaimed; and oh! it was with such vindictive fierceness that he spoke, I even trembled for my life. "Go, Ellen—with the taint of dishonour upon your name—the blight of degradation upon your repute! Go—and your exit is to be made from a house belonging to the veriest debauchee whose notorious profligacies ever made a private dwelling more infamous than the lowest den of crime! Go forth, I say—dishonoured, though innocent—polluted, though stainless! Even on the virgin rosebud rests the slime of the snail: and so it shall be now with the freshness of thy virgin name!"

"Oh! you are a fiend!" I ejaculated, clasping my hands in the anguish of despair.

"A fiend? Yes—to *you*!" he cried: and as his eyes appeared to shoot forth, while his ashy lips were quivering over his set teeth, he advanced towards me, exclaiming, "By heaven, I have a mind to render you the victim of that very dishonour which my tongue shall proclaim against you!"

"Wretch!" I cried: and I was on the very point of sending a shriek pealing forth from my lips, when a sudden idea struck me.

An idea? Oh, it was a recollection! Strangely absorbing must hitherto have been the whole scene, in its effects of blending terror and eloquence, enthralling language and frightful meance—language of love and language of hate—Oh! absorbing must it have been that this recollection did not strike me before. Yet so it was. It was only now in this

which appeared to be the moment of my utter emergency, that the remembrance flashed in unto my brain!

My eyes fell upon a vase of flowers standing in the centre of a superb table; and as St. Clair came advancing toward me, with looks that too well indicated his readiness for any villany, I snatched forth a large and beautiful white rose—and extending it towards him, exclaimed, "Do you recognise the symbol?"

Oh! had some unseen lightning suddenly pierced through roof and ceiling, or window, or wall, to smite him with its withering influence?—had a spectre from the dead, invisible to my eyes, suddenly sprung up through earth and floor to scare him its hideous presence? Never, never shall I forget the terrible, the appalling, the stupendous effect which that flower and those words produced upon Edwin St. Clair! Whiter as a sheet became his countenance: rigid in their strong expression of agony grew his features; and all the suddenly-excited emotions of his soul congealed into horror's most terrific impress upon his face. He staggered back, and sank like one annihilated upon a chair.

Like Aladdin in the Eastern Tale, I was at first horrified and astounded at the effect produced by the talisman placed in my hands: my feelings quickly experienced a revulsion, turning them into a consummate joy at this proof that my enemy was in every way defeated and that I myself was in every sense victorious.

I issued from the room. methought I heard Edwin St. Clair gasp forth my name, as if to bid me stay: but if it were so, his appeal passed unheeded. No one was on the landing: my ears caught the sounds of the giggling laughter of the girls in the back room: I hurried down the staircase, and emerged from the house. Entering the hackney-coach, I ordered the driver to take me back to the street: where Melissa dwelt: and during the route thither it may be easily supposed that I reflected on all that had occurred at the house which I had just left. Potent indeed had proved the effect of the talisman with which Lady Lilla Essendine had provided me: but of its meaning I remained utterly ignorant. Whatsoever the flower symbolised, was still a perfect mystery to me. I had however no fear that St. Clair would carry in operation his horrible threats: there was no doubt as to the fact that I had by some unknown means reduced him to the most abject position of horror and mental wretchedness. And as I thus reflected, how grateful—how deeply, deeply grateful did I feel towards Lady Lilla Essendine!

But now I began to ask myself what course I should pursue in reference to Melissa Harrison? She had evidently nothing to hope for either herself or her babe at the hands of the unprincipled Colonel Bellew. This communication must at least be made to her: but still I did not choose to enhance her affliction by giving her any additional proofs of the villany and profligacy of that man; there was no necessity to make her acquainted with my previous knowledge of him, nor to describe the manner in which I had found him passing his forenoon. I therefore made up my mind to deal as succinctly with the affair as possible. That she knew him under a feigned name, was evident enough: for if she had been acquainted with his real one, she would no doubt have mentioned it to me.

In the midst of my meditations, there were two circumstances which claimed a portion of my attention.

In the first place, the house which I had just visited was not the same to which I had been conveyed on the evening of the dinner at Mr. Parks's; and therefore methought that Colonel Bellew must have two distinct establishments, so that he might all the more conveniently and extensively carry on his profligate career. The other circumstance to which I have alluded, was the renewed intimacy evidently subsisting between Captain St. Clair and the profligate Colonel. I must confess that I began to have suspicions as to whether that intimacy had ever been interrupted, and whether everything I had heard in respect to the duel were a reality or not. On these points, however, I need not now dwell. Suffice it to add that in respect to Captain St. Clair, had seen him with his mask thrown off—I had beheld him in the two fiendishness of his character—I had been compelled to shudder at the revelation of a monster of wickedness hitherto concealed beneathe one of the most perfect human shapes. Ah! no longer did I doubt that all I had learnt from the lips of Lady Lilla Essendine in respect to St. Clair's character was only too true; and therefore in proportion as he had sunk down to the lowest abyss in my estimation, did her ladyship ascend to the highest pinnacle of my good opinion.

After so terribly exciting a scene, it was no wonder that I looked pale and ill on arriving at Melissa's lodgings. The unfortunate young woman, who had been awaiting my return with the most anxious suspense, was at once smitten with the conviction of the failure of my errand as I returned into her presence.

"God help me!" she murmured, clasping her hands. "I comprehend it all, Ellen!—your looks proclaim the truth! You have accomplished no good?"

"Melissa," I answered, seating myself by the bedside, "deeply, deeply do I regret that I am unable to afford you any hope in that quarter—no, not even the slightest! Ask me not to give you particulars: it were of no avail to recapitulate what has just passed."

"No, dear Ellen," murmured Melissa, her voice almost choked with her profound sobs; "I will not ask you to recapitulate that which must have been at least painful—and perhaps insulting to yourself. Oh! never, never shall I forget this kindness which you have shown me! But my God! my poor child——"

"Listen, dear Melissa," I said with difficulty keeping back my tears. "I shall shortly go upon the stage; and I know not why—but believe me, it is not mere idle vanity when I declare that something tells me that I shall succeed——"

"Oh, it is natural," exclaimed Melissa, "that you should entertain this conviction. How can conscious genius do otherwise than predicate of its own success? And you *will* be successful, my sweet friend!—I am convinced of it! Did I not behold you give your first recitation in the presence of Mr. Richards?—have I not since heard you frequently, when practising under the tutelage of Mr. and Mrs. Norman——"

"And if I be successful, Melissa," I interrupted her, my cheeks now crimson with praises she was bestowing upon me—or rather which her language inferred, "it will be a source of still greater happiness for me, inasmuch as I shall be enabled to succour those in whom I feel interested, and whom I love. Now, do you not understand me, Melissa?—and will you not believe me when I promise——"

"Ah, Ellen, I know what you

mean!" exclaimed Miss Harrison, throwing her arms around my neck: "you are an angel—and success must be yours!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEBUT.

THE day—the memorable day—arrived, on which I was to make my first appearance upon a stage before the public. Thanks to the kind and zealous instructions of Mr. and Mrs. Norman, I had beeen well schooled in the elementary details of the profession in which I was about to embark; and having again given a specimen of my acquirements in the presence of Mr. Richards, I received from that gentleman the promise of an engagement, provided my *debut* should prove successful. My utterance and deportment were admired; and though I had not as yet altogether conquered that shyness and reserve which were the natural consequences of the seclusion in which all the earlier part of my life had been spent,—yet did I feel sufficient confidence in my own courage to pass through the ordeal. Indeed, I had every incentive. I longed to eat the bread of independence: I longed to justify the predictions of the excellent family to whom I was so deeply indebted: I longed to win a fame that should render my aunt and my cousin proud of me: I longed to have the command of money, that I might quietly and unostentatiously succour such cases as that of Melissa Harrison; and lastly, diffident and retiring as I was in all other respects, I had a certain little ambition of my own—an ambition to shine in a particular sphere. Thus was it that when the memorable day dawned, I hailed it rather with a calm confidence than with any inward misgiving. At the same time, be it understood, I was not vainglorious, presumptuous, nor conceited: I had a certain consciousness of ability in that which I had undertaken; and I felt persuaded that if my success should not prove very brilliant, my failure on the other hand would not be very signal.

I had practised several characters under the tuition of the Normans:—that of Portia in the "Merchant of Venice"—that of Lady Ann in "Richard the Third"—that of the heroine in "Romeo and Juliet"—that of Queen Catherine in "Henry the Eighth"—that of Isabella in "Measure for Measure"—that of Zara in Congreve's "Mourning Bride"—and several others: but after a long discussion, it had been determined that the character of Portia should be the one in which I was to appear. I did not choose to come forth under my own name. I had hitherto managed most successfully to conceal my pursuits from the knowledge of my aunt and cousin: if I were to fail they need never know that I had attempted a theatrical career; and if I were to succeed, I resolved that the truth should only be communicated to them when my fame was established. Thus it was under a pseudonym that I was to present myself to the public: and the play-bills announced the first appearance of Miss Trafford.

It was in the middle of the month of May 1840—when I was within a couple of months of the attainment of my eighteenth year—that this memorable event in my life took place. The theatre was crowded to excess: for the aristocratic visitors at the Normans' house had made it their business to spread the most favour-

able predictions relative to myself as the *protegee* of those worthy people. As a matter of course, my real name was known to a limited circle: but, at the earnest entreaty of the Normans, so much discretion had been observed that this knowledge was not more widely propagated Mr. Norman was to appear in the same peace; he was to personate the Duke of Venice: but Mrs. Norman was notincluded in the cast of characters. She therefore, together with Juliet, remained with me in my dressing-room, to encourage me before I went upon the stage—to receive and welcome me during the intervals of my performance; and nothing could exceed the kindness I experienced at the hands of those excellent friends.

As the moment approached when, at the commencement of the second scene, I was to emerge into the full glare of light and become the focus for nearly three thousand pair of eyes, I felt my heart sink within me my confidence was rapidly evaporating. But exercising as it were all the moral energy which I possessed —nerving myself with all the courage I could muster up—I entered upon the grand ordeal. I remember that I tottered rather than walked upon the stage: and then, as rapturous shouts pealed forth my welcome, and white kerchiefs were waved by fair hands from the boxes, such a dizziness seized upon me that I wonder I did not fall. I was blinded by the glare of light: I could not distinguish the audience individually: I had a confused idea that the whole space upon which I looked was paved with human faces. The thought struck me that my failure was already doomed, and that I should not be enabled to give utterance to a single word. My part seemed to be as completely forgotten as if my memory had never taken cognizance of it at all.

At length all was silence; and I had to commence. The prompter from his place gave me the key—"By my troth, Nerissa:"—and like a lightning-flash my part came back to my memory. I remember that I ejaculated within myself, "Now I am safe!"—and I began speaking. Still it was in the midst of a species of confusion—with a continued dizziness of the brain, and with an oppressive sense of having as a pigmy undertaken the task of a giantess—that I went on. Although I felt that I was safe so far as my memory was concerned, I experienced no satisfaction at the manner I was enacting my part. There was in my brain a continuous sense of sins of commission and sins of omission,—doing something against which the Normans in their lessons had warned me, and forgetting other things which I had been entreated to bear in mind. Thus, when the scene was ended, and loud applause followed me as I went off, I attributed it merely to the kindness of the audience; and I expected to behold sadness depicted on the countenance of the Normans, who were at the "wings" to receive me. I hurried to my dressing-room; and sinking upon a seat, was ready to weep with vexation at what I believed to be the folly—the madness, which had urged me on to the catastrophe of such a failure!

"You will be more collected presently, my dear girl," said Mrs. Norman, bending down and kissing my forehead.

"Now that the first step is taken," said Juliet, in her most gentle tone, "you will be less diffident in the next scene."

I said nothing: but I thanked my friends with my looks. I thought to myself that they were fully aware

it was a failure on my part, and they wished to spare my feelings as much as possible. Again I went upon the stage; and now I became painfully conscious how tremulous were my tones and how diffident was my demeanour. As the piece progressed, however, I grew more collected: I overcame much of that weakness and tremulousness of utterance that I was previously unable to conquer; and at the conclusion of the ninth scene of the second act —after the interview with the Prince of Arragon—Mrs. Norman and Juliet assured me that I had acquitted myself quite as wellas couldbe expected.

The trial scene was soon at hand; and for this I was apparelled in the usual advocate's garb. Juliet whispered the most flattering compliments in my ears; Mrs. Norman besought me to remember the various suggestions she had given me relative to the great speech which I should have to address to Shylock. As I thought of the commencement of that speech—"The quality of mercy is not strained"—I experienced a sudden thrill which as yet I had not known—a glow of the heart as if I were at length to identify myself with the true spirit and feeling of the part which I had to perform. A sensation of unspeakable happiness diffused itself throughout my frame; and when the instant arrived for me to pass upon the stage, I no longer felt timid. On commencing that great speech, my voice acquired a sudden strength—I forgot the audience—I was undazzed by the blaze of light—I beheld only the tribunal—I fancied myself to be Portia! Yet I was aware of the profound silence which filled the vast theatre, all save in respect to my own voice: and there was a thrill of pride in my soul at the conviction that this breathless attention was for the language that was flowing from my lips. The scene progressed: my spirits rose with it: something within me seemed to say that I was now indeed in the right vein; and on my exit the vast building rang with applause.

"My dear Ellen, you have triumphed!" exclaimed Mrs. Norman, folding me in her arms the instant I had gained my dressing-room.

"I knew it all along," said Juliet: "I saw it from the very first. Your opening scene was admirable——"

"Oh, this is flattery, my dear friend!" I said: "for nothing could have been worse!"

"Good heavens!" cried Juliet, "how you misunderstand yourself! You were true to nature! Mr. Richards himself said so."

"Then Nature's self assisted me," I murmured in astonishment, and indeed with more or less incredulity —for methought that my failure had at first been complete.

Mrs. Norman and her daughter continued to assure me again and again that all my misgivings were unfounded, and that I had surpassed their expectations. I said but little. In my own mind I fancied that they were greatly exaggerating, but for the kindest of purposes, whatsoever little merit I had displayed; and I still thought that, except in the trial scene, my *debt* was more than half a failure.

The piece progressed; and when it concluded there was one general and rapturous call for "Miss Trafford!" Mr. Richards led me on; bouquets were showered upon me; and the plaudits were deafening. I was overwhelmed with a sense of shame, rather than with pride and gratification; because I conscientiously felt that I did not deserve all this. On regaining my dressing-room I fainted in the arms of Mrs. Norman.

As I slowly came back to cons-

sciousness, I heard a voice whispering, "It was admirable for a first appearance: but believe me, it is nothing to what she is capable of?"

"Hush! she is recovering!"

The first speaker was the actress who had performed the part of Jessica—a very clever, shrewd and intelligent young lady: the other, who had bidden her be silent, was the actress who had played Nerissa. On being completely restored to consciousness, I received the congratulations of these ladies; and when I had resumed my own apparel, I hastened with Mrs. Norman to the carriage—for I was anxious to get home. Mr. Richards however intercepted me on the way, to address me in a similar strain: and thus I began to think that I had perhaps after all acquitted myself better than my own diffidence and apprehensions had allowed me to imagine. Thoroughly exhausted, I sought my couch and slept soundly.

I was awakened in the morning by the entrance of Juliet, who came into my room, her countenance beaming with animation, and with several newspapers in her hand.

"Now perhaps you will believe us, my dear Ellen!" she said,—"which I saw that you would not do last night. Read—read for yourself!"

"Do they—do they indeed speak well of me?" I falteringly asked, with feelings of mingled suspense and joy.

"Nay, read, Ellen!" exclaimed Juliet; "and if you have at times blamed me for any little compliments which in the truthful spirit of friendship I have bestowed upon you, you will now blush for the next hour to come. There! I will leave the papers with you."

The good-hearted Juliet flung the journals upon the bed with looks as full of exultation as if the favourable notices they contained had regarded herself; and she then hurried from the room. It was in one sense with avidity, but in another with trembling hands and fluttering heart, that I caught up the newspapers, and commenced hastily scanning the critiques upon my performance. They all spoke highly of me, declaring that my success was complete, and to my astonishment mistaking the very diffidence and shyness which in certain parts I had displayed, as a deliberate and purposed adherence to the truthfulness of nature. The reviewers were unanimous in the opinion that I had made the part my own—that I had discarded the mannerisms of precedents—and that I had formed an appreciation of Portia's feelings and demeanour different in several instances from that entertained by other actresses. Although I was alone in that chamber, yet did I feel my cheeks glowing as I read such sentences as these:—"To a most ravishing personal beauty Miss Trafford joins an elegant deportment and most lady-like manners."—"Nothing can excel the loveliness of this new candidate for dramatic fame: her face and figure are perfect; her voice, rich toned melodious, is capable of considerable power, and has all the inflections of the most graceful eloquence."—"The *debut* of Miss Trafford is quite an event in the dramatic world; and all who beheld her last night, must admit that a star has at length revealed itself in that sphere where for a long time such brilliant luminaries have been singularly deficient."—"This young lady has all the advantages of great personal beauty, a voice of surpassing melody and high mental accomplishments. Her success last night, if not actually brilliant, was at least positive and unquestionable; and we predict

that she is destined to acquire the highest fame in the profession which she has chosen."

The reader must not imagine that I have been impelled by vanity to place these quotations on record: my purpose in thus transferring them to this page, is simply to show how little I understood the effect of my own performance on the preceding night. And it would be a miserable affectation to deny that I was flattered—I was gratified—I was even rendered exultant by the critical opinions which I thus perused. Need I add that they confirmed me in the resolve to adopt the stage as a profession?—or need I inform the reader that fervid was the gratitude I expressed to Mr. and Mrs. Norman for the zeal which they had instructed me in the dramatic art?

I may now pause to observe that I had not once seen Edwin St. Clair during the ten days which had elapsed since the memorable occurrence at Colonel Bellew's house. That occurrence I had not mentioned to a soul; I considered it to be something which ought to be kept secret in obedience to the injunctions given me by Lady Lilla Essendine, when at Mr. Parks's house she made me aware of the talisman which would serve me in any emergency in which St. Clair's conduct might chance to place me. As for Melissa Harrison, she continued chained by sickness to her couch. I had regularly visited her every day—frequently accompanied by Juliet; and on repairing to her lodgings on this day which succeeded the evening of my *debut*, I received from the unfortunate invalid the most fervid congratulations for my success.

A week passed—during which I performed three times: namely, on alternate nights. My first appearance was, as the reader is aware, as Portia; on the second occasion I enacted the same character: but on the third I personated the heroine in "Romeo and Juliet." My success was complete. Crowded houses—rapturous applause—countless bouquets—the congratulations of my friends—the most courteous deference on the part of Mr. Richards—and complimentary reviews in the public journals,—these were the evidences of my triumphs; and I could no longer doubt that I had underrated my own merits on the first night of my appearance. Oh! the threshould of Fame's temple was crossed!—the ivory portals had expanded to admit me into that fane! It seemed as if all the wildest hopes to which I had ever abandoned myself were to be realised, and that I was veritably to become a great actress! But not yet—no, not yet would I communicate the intelligence to my aunt and cousin. Still would I permit them to repose in the belief that I continued a humble sojourner with kind friends, utilising my little accomplishments to an extent sufficient to avoid being a burden to them—but nothing beyond. It should only be when my fame was fully established—when there could be no doubt as to the general appreciation of my genius—when, by a continuous series of trials, I should have proved that this was no evanescent flashing of a spirit, but a lasting and durable lustre—Oh! it should not be until all this was done, that I would reveal my secret to those whom I knew to be so deeply interested in my welfare. Such was my resolve.

And here I may mention how sweet—Oh! how sweet it was to receive at the end of the week the first remuneration which my talents had ever earned. With what a mingled glow of pride and satisfaction did I contemplate the gold which was placed in my hand!—

and with what fervid feelings of gratitude did I endeavour to force that sum upon Mrs. Norman! But she absolutely refused to receive it; and it was only when I positively assured her that I could not continue to eat the bread of her unrecompensed bounty that the kind-hearted creature consented to accept a part.

For the next two or three weeks I played with continued success; and then there was to be a month's suspension of the performances, for the purpose of decorating and repairing the theatre and making arrangements for a new theatrical campaign. It was now the end of June; and Mr. Norman proposed that we should pass the month's holiday at a watering-place. But a circumstance occurred to separate me temporarily from my friends and afford me a different change of scene from that which they enjoyed.

One afternoon a handsome carriage drove up to the door of the Normans' house in Hunter Street; and Lady Lilla Essendine sent up her card with an intimation that she had come to call upon me. She was at once shown up into the drawing-room—whither I hastened to join her; and we were there alone together.

"In the first place, my dear Ellen," she said, treating me with as much familiarity and kindness as if we were old friends,—"in the first place I must offer my congratulations upon the triumph you have achieved; and in the second place I must beg you to give me the favour of your society at my little surburban residence, during the month which, as I see by the newspapers, you are now to have at your own disposal."

Be it recollected, reader, that Lady Lilla had risen as high in my estimation as St. Clair had sank low down; and therefore I was charmed and flattered by her visit, as well as astonished at what appeared to me her graceful condescension in seeking the society of an actress. Besides, there was a sweet amiability in her manner—such an unaffected cordiality, as it seemed to me—that I was quite disposed to accept the friendship of Lady Lilla Essendine. Nevertheless, there was one cause for hesitation! and this I failed not to express when I had proffered suitable acknowledgments for her kindness towards me.

"I have not forgotten, my lady," I said, as I felt a light colour rising to my cheeks, "that I have adopted a career on which some portion of society is wont to look superciliously if not scornfully—"

"Hush Ellen!" interposed her ladyship, placing her finger upon my lip; "such language as this must not low from your tongue. Every one who speaks of the talents of Miss Trafford," she continued, with a playfully-arch smile as she thus mentioned my pseudonym, "fails not to eulogize her exemplary character also. It is soon known in the theatrical world whether a fair candidate for fame be right-principled or otherwise; and the report spreads accordingly throughout society. You have nothing to be ashamed of: and rest assured that the highest in the land will not hesitate to caress and court you. Have we not all read how Mrs. Siddons, the instant she grew renowned, became the favorite of the aristocracy—and how at the comparatively-humble lodging which through economical motives for her children's sake, she occupied in some street leading out of the Strand, carriages with coronets upon their panels called daily, and titled ladies as well as men of the

loftiest rank left their cards in compliment to the actress?"

I felt pleased at the manner in which Lady Lilla Essendine thus addressed me and at the delicacy of the language in which she urged me to accept her invitation.

"You must not fancy," she continued, "that I keep much society. You will meet but very few visitors at my house; and my only fear is that you may possibly find the time hang heavily upon your hands. Besides, I am not rich: my mode of living is comparatively humble; and my life has not been such a happy one as to leave the first gaitey of youth unimpaired and render me enamoured of the bustle and brilliancy of the fashionable world."

Lady Lilla Essendine said so many kind things that I could not possibly refuse her invitation; but still I would not give her an immediate response without consulting Mr. and Mrs. Norman, towards whom I experienced a species of filial affection—nor without speaking to Juliet, whom I loved as well as if she were sister. Lady Lilla bade me hasten to them at once: and I accordingly proceeded to the parlour where they were seated. I explained the object of her ladyship's visit; and they bade me by all means cultivate an acquaintance which might possibly be useful to me. There was however one thing which struck me as somewhat peculiar, and which even for a moment pained me. It was that her ladyship had not asked to be introduced to the Normans; and though they said nothing upon the subject, they had the good taste—and perhaps the pride also—not to repair to the drawing-room where she was awaiting my return.

My preparations for departure were speedily made; but before I felt, I wrote a note to Melissa Harrison, explaining the reason wherefore I should not be enabled to visit her as regularly as heretofore, and enclosing a sum of money. I besought her in most delicate terms to make use of it, and accept it as if from the hands of a sister. My trunk was then conveyed down to Lady Lilla's carriage. I took an affectionate leave of the Normans—and thus departed with her ladyship.

"You may possibly think it strange, my dear Ellen," she said as the equipage bore us along through the streets of London, "that I did not request you to present me to your friends: but though all circumstances combine to render me desirous of having *your* society, it would not be exactly suitable for one in my position to form an extensive acquaintance in a particular sphere. And now tell me—has anything particular occurred since first we met at the house of our mutual friends the Parkses?"

I reflected for a few moments; and I thought that inasmuch as it was Lady Lilla herself who had furnished me the means of meeting any emergency in which the conduct of Edwin St. Clair might happen to place me, there was no necessity for maintaining any reserve towards her—but on the other hand, that she had a sort of right to be made acquainted with everything that had happened. Being once disposed to give her my confidence, I did not choose to do it by halves: and I therefore explained first of all how St. Clair had offered me his hand, and how I had refused him—how I had been carried off in the hackney-coach on the night of Mr. Parks's dinner-party—and how St. Clair had rescued me from the power of Colonel Bellew. But I did not mention a syllable in respect to the strange fragment of a letter which I had found in the

drawer of the toilet-table on that memorable occasion: for I was afraid lest it might be thought that I was of an unseemingly curious and prying disposition. I went on to explain how St. Clair had fought a duel on my behalf: and then I came to the narrative of Melissa Harrison's illness (suppressing her name however)—the mission I had undertaken for her—and everything which had occurred at Colonel Bellew's house,—especially the closing scene in which the presentation of a flower had produced such an awfullytalismanic effect on Captain St. Clair.

Her ladyship listened to me with an attention which was alike eager and deep: she spoke not a syllable throughout the narration of my tale: but her countenance, by its varying expression, showed that there were feelings in her own bosom which were profundly stirred.

"I am glad that you have told me all this!" she said, when I had finished. "Did I not assure you that Edwin St. Clair was not the man to leave you unmolested? But I can throw considerable light upon some portions of your narrative, into the full meaning of which you have not as yet penetrated. Ellen," she added, fixing her blue eyes significantly upon me, "you were the dupe of one of the basest stratagems of which St. Clair, with all his refined instinct for mischief, was capable! But you shall see."

Her ladyship sulled the check-string; and the carriage stopped. The footman descended, and came to the window for orders. Lady Lilla desired that the carriage might be driven along a particular thoroughfare; and I now observed that we were in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park. The equipage pursued its way; and Lilla said to me, "Now keep watch, Ellen! I am about to point out to you a particular house——"

"But perhaps I shall not recognise it?" I exclaimed, as the thought immediately struck me that she was alluding to the scene of that outrage which I had experienced on the night of the dinner at Mr. Park's.

"Look well!—we are approaching it!" she suddenly cried. "Surely you can recollect——"

"Yes, yes—I do!" I ejaculated, as she pointed out a particular villa-residence which the equipage was just approaching. "It is the same!"

"And that house," continued Lady Lilla Essendine, again fixing her large and beautiful blue eyes significantly upon me,—"that house belongs not to Colonel Bellew—but it is a suburban retreat in the possession of Captain St. Clair."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, suddenly bewildered what to think. "Is this possible?"

"Oh, my dear Ellen!" exclaimed Lady Lilla, "if you cannot read the whole truth of that adventure, I can read it for you! Yes—that is St. Clair's house!—and rest assured that Bellew was but the instrument of St. Clair's deep-laid stratagem!"

"But this is monstrous!" I cried, terribly shocked. "He had offered me his hand in marriage——"

"Yes—no doubt he was infatuated with you; and by that stratagem he hoped to win you as his wife. Do you not now comprehend it? It was Bellew who was to have the appearance of carrying you off—and St. Clair was to rescue you. The duel was equally a sham: it was to win your sympathy. No such hostile encounter ever took place; nor was St. Clair wounded.

Gratitude and sympathy—these were the debts you owed him: and he conceived that in such circumstances you could not fail to accept his hand."

"It would be impossible to describe the indignation which seized upon me as I comprehended the truth of all that Lady Lilla was saying. Every circumstance confirmed it. St. Clair had fallen on his knees to plead his passion at my feet immediately after the pretence of rescuing me from Colonel Bellew; I had subsequently found him a visitor at the Colonel's own house; and on that very occasion suspicions had been excited in my mind in respect to the complete truth of the story of the duel. But now even amidst my very indignation did my soul experience a sudden shock, as it struck me that the letter of which I had read a fragment was not after all addressed to Colonel Bellew, but to St. Clair himself! Good heavens, in what a frightful shape of wickedness was the whole character of Edwin St. Clair now revealed to my view,—and I who had at one time proffered him my friendship—although I thanked God that I had been saved the deplorable catastrophe of giving him my love!

"And does your ladyship think," I tremulously inquired, "that Mr. and Mrs. Parks could have been in any way accessory to Colonel Bellew's stratagem on behalf of Captain St. Clair that night?"

Lilla reflected for some moments; and then she said impressively, "No!—it is impossible!"

There was now a long interval of silence—during which I meditated profoundly and painfully, yet thankfully, on all the incidents of the recent past upon which so strong a light had just been shed. Yes—painfully did I meditate, as I thought of the diabolic stratagems of which I had been rendered the object, and of the perils which the fiendish villany of St. Clair had raised up around me like a woven mesh: but I was thankful likewise at the manner in which I had escaped from that tangled skein of dangerous intricacies.

"Ah, my dear Lady Lilla," I suddenly exclaimed, "how deeply, deeply grateful am I to you for having afforded me the means of triumphing at last over that wicked and designing man, and reducing him to abject powerlessness. But if it be not indiscreet, tell me in what constituted the charm which produced such an awful effect?"

"The effect, then, *was* very awful?" said Lady Lilla inquiringly: "and St. Clair was appalled?"

"Never before did I witness such a scene," I responded, shuddering at the bare recollection, "and heaven grant that I may never again behold such a spectacle of ghastly horrors as that which Captain St. Clair presented to my view when I took the flower from the vase!"

Lady Lilla averted her countenance, and looked for some minutes from the carriage-window. During that interval there was again a profound silence; and when she once more turned towards me, she said, "You must not question me, Ellen, relative to the meaning of that charm which wrought such power. Suffice it for you that it served your purpose on the occasion. But beseech you to keep the seal of secrecy inviolably upon your lips—as you ere now assured me that you have hitherto done. I told you the other night that during the lifetime of my late husband, St. Clair's uncle, circumstances came to my knowledge——But here we are at my humble residence!"

CHAPTER XIII.

CLAREMONT VILLA.

LADY LILLA ESSENDINE occupied a beautiful villa in the neighbourhood of St. John's Wood, Regent's Park. It was not a spacious dwelling—but it was commodious, and elegantly furnished. Standing back about thirty yards from the road, it had a screen of shrubs along the palings in front, and which shut in a small but well-kept lawn. It had a garden of tolerable dimensions attached; and this was closed in the rear by a small shrubberry. In the summer-time it was a truly-charming retreat; though I fancied that in the winter it must be somewhat lonely and dull. Its situation was completely isolated; and the nearest habitation—also a charming villa—was about two hundred yards distant. Three female and two male servants comprised her ladyship's domestic establishment; and though not possessed of affluence for a lady of her rank and position, she evidently enjoyed a handsome competency. Indeed, St. Clair had told me that she had an income of fifteen hundred a year—which seemed to be true enough, judging of the style in which she lived; although I now looked with suspicion upon every statement that I had at any time heard from St. Clair's lips.

Several days passed agreeably enough; for the villa was conveniently situated for the beautiful walks and drives in the neighbourhood. Her ladyship was visited by a few friends, belonging to the partician grade; and by them was I treated with the utmost kindness and distinction.

One day—when I had been about a week at Claremont Villa, as the house was called—an incident occurred which troubled me greatly. It was in the forenoon: I had been rambling alone in the garden; but the sultry heat of the sun at length drove me indoors. Lady Lilla was writing at her desk in the parlours which we habitually used. Almost immediately after I thus entered that parlour, she was summoned from the room: and I approached the table to take thence a book which I was in the course of reading. Two or three notes, which Lady Lilla had written, lay upon the very book that I required; and as I removed these bullets, I was struck by the writing of the addresses. It was the first time I had seen her ladyship's hand writing, I experienced a shock more powerful than I can possible describe: for it struck me all in a moment that it was the very same handwriting as that which I had seen in the fragment of the letter at St. Clair's house. A dizziness came over my sight, as all the contents of that fragment rushed back to my recollection. Good heavens! was it possible that Lady Lilla herself could have been the victim who had addressed the author of her ruin in Language so harrowing, so horrible, so anguished, so despairing, as that which I had read in the fragment alluded to?

Passing my hand across my eyes to dispel the film which had settled upon them, I looked again at the superscriptions of these notes. Yes—it seemed to me the same beautiful handwriting; though that of the fragment I remembered to have been tremulous, and that of these billets was firm in its feminine delicacy and perfect fluency. I heard footsteps approaching the door; and rapidly retreating to the sofa, I sat down as if I had been all along occupying it since my entrance into the parlour. It was however with

the utmost difficulty that I could compose my looks; while, as to my feelings, they were cruelly harrowed and tortured. Lady Lilla began to converse with me; and as I listened to the soft music of her voice, so calm and so collected—as I contemplated her countenance,—so surpassingly beautiful—as I thought of her age, which could not exceed two-and-twenty—I said within myself, "Is it possible that this being of transcending loveliness could ever have known such stupendous anguish—such ineffable remorse as the fragment of the letter seemed to indicate? Could *she* who has the countenance and shape of an angel, have ever penned language denoting the consciousness of crime.

It appeared to me as if I were in the midst of a horrible dream; and availing myself of a pause in the conversation, I rose and issued from the room. Flinging on my large garden-hat, which I had left upon the hall-table, I went forth again into the grounds. It seemed as if I must absolutely court solitude in order to commune with myself: it seemed likewise as if there were something which I ought to do, but which I knew not rightly how to accomplish. Should I speak to Lady Lilla Essendine?—should I tell her of the circumstance of having read the fragment at St. Clair's house, and beseech her, in the name of the friendship she professed for me, to clear up the horrible mystery which now appeared to hang round herself? Or should I devise some pretext for leaving her abode and rejoining my friends, the Normans? I was bewildered how to act. I did not like to address her ladyship on the subject, for fear lest there should be some terrible mistake on my part: and yet, on the other hand, I felt shocked at the notion of continuing to be the guest and friend of one who, if my suspicion were well founded, had put upon record such frightful self accusings.

Utterly unable to make up my mind how to act, I wandered into the shrubbery. The back gate stood open; for a gardener was at work on the premises: and I issued forth. A lane skirted the boundary-walk: and along this I slowly proceeded—my soul a prey to the most painful feelings. Was is not natural for me to entertain the suspicion that Lady Lilla Essendine had been rendered the victim of St. Clair's guile, and that the letter of which I had seen a fragment was written by her under the influence of poignant and excruciating remorse for her infidelity towards the husband who perhaps noted upon her? And yet what if I were after all mistaken?—what if a mere coincidental resemblance between one handwriting and another had deceived me? And amongst ladies of superior education was there not often a striking identity of styles of penmanship? Oh! if I were labouring under an error, how cruel and how unpardonable an insult would it be to Lady Lilla Essendine to breathe a syllable which savoured of a suspicion or an aspersion!

While I was thus reflecting in bewilderment and uncertainty, a turning in the lane suddenly brought me into the presence of two singular looking women, whom I at once knew to be of the gipsy race. One was an old crone, with winkled countenance and bowed form—but with dark eyes that had lost little of their youthful fire, and were peculiarly keen and piercing. Her look was not merely cunning, but had something sinister in it, which was still more repelling when she began smirking and smiling as she caught sight of me. Her companion was a

much younger woman—indeed apparently not more than about four-and-twenty. She possessed a very fine person, and though her features were coarse and large, they were by no means unhandsome. Her feet were naked; and her lower limbs—a considerable portion of which the short skirt of her dress left exposed—were singularly symmetrical in their robustness. She was stout and upon a large scale, but well-proportioned. Methought that she would have made an admirable model for a sculptor delineating with his marble the feminine form in amazonian proportions. Her hair, dark as jet, and without the slightest gloss upon it, hung upon her shoulders: her eyes, of deepest blackness, were large and brilliantly lustrous: her lips, which were full even to coarseness, but of the brightest cherry hue, revealed a set of teeth that might be compared to ivory. She was leaning against a tree; and her look was bold and full of hardihood, though by no means insolent as she gazed upon me.

I had come upon this couple so suddenly, and was by their presence so abruptly startled from the meditations in which I was previously plunged, that I stopped short; and the old crone at once accosted me. She began to address me in the manner usually adopted by people of her race—complimenting me upon my beauty—talking some jargon about a handsome lover—and desiring me to cross her palm with silver that she might tell me my fortune. Her swarthy countenance was all puckered up with wrinkles as she smiled and smirked while giving utterance to her habitual cant; and great was the contrast between that shrivelled sinister face, and the round plump countenance of the younger gipsy, through the duskiness of whose complexion the warm blood mantled richly.

"Stay, pretty lady," said the old crone, "while I develop the future to your view. I see at a glance that this fair white hand is crossed by many lines. Suffer me to read them."

I had no gloves on; for I had left the house hurriedly, and without any intention of issuing outside the garden wall. I was in a morning *deshabille* too; and as I have already said, had on a large straw hat. The old gipsy had taken my hand; and I scarcely know in what singular mood it was that I for a few moments abandoned it her. But my feelings were at the time rendered morbid by the thoughts that had been agitating in my brain; and when the mind is in this state it is apt to be more or less tinctured with superstition, or a tendency towards the marvellous.

"I see," continued the old gipsy, peering over my palm, "that there is a tall, handsome youth, not very much older than yourself—with dark hair and eyes—slender and graceful shape — and the most winning manners—whose heart is filled with your image. Yes," she proceeded, suddenly looking up into my countenance: "and upon *your* heart, pretty maiden, is *his* image impressed!"

Here I suddenly withdrew my hand, while I felt the blushes glowing upon my cheeks. I was about to hurry onward, when the crone exclaimed, "You have forgotten to cross my hand with silver!"

I was excessively annoyed with myself that I should have yielded even for a few moments to the influence which had led me to abandon my hand to the old woman: but I felt that having done so, I ought to give her a reward. Full of the confusion occasioned by my

own vexed feelings, I thrust my hand into my pocket: my purse was not there.

"Stop," I said, "and I will hasten and fetch you something. I have left my money indoors."

"One moment, sweet maiden!" ejaculated the old crone: "and if you will render me a little service, you need not trouble yourself to confer any additional recompense upon me."

"Nonsense, grandmother!" said the younger gipsy, now accosting the crone and catching her somewhat roughly by the arm. "How do you know who this young lady is?"

"Tell me, my sweet maiden," said the dame, still addressing herself to me, apparently heedless of her granddaughter's interruption; "did I not ere now behold you walking in the garden attached to this nearest villa? Methought that as I passed the front gate I caught a glimpse of that beautiful form of yours——"

"Enough of this idle flattery!" I interrupted her. "Yes,—it is true I was walking in that garden. But what can you possibly mean by the intimation that I may render you a service?"

"You shall see," rejoined the crone; "for you are an amiable young lady—and you will not, as insolent menials would, disdain the old gipsy's supplication."

"Be careful, grandmother!" the younger female hurriedly whispered but my ear caught what she said.

"Be quiet, Zarah!" interjected the crone, as she turned impatiently towards her granddaughter. "I know what I am doing; and this pretty maiden will accomplish the stifling little service that I ask at her hands. Will you not, miss?"

"I will fetch you some trifle," I said, anxious to put an end to this scene in which I had involved myself; "but as for my ability to render you any real service, it is impossible—and you can only be indulging in that language of mysterious absurdity which forms a portion of your craft."

"It is not so, sweet maiden," rejoined the gipsy crone. "There is something in your countenance so amiable and good-natured, it tells me you will do my bidding! And the boon I crave is so simple! It is only that you will tell the lady of the house that one who knows her, seeks a few minutes' interview on this very spot."

"This is absurd," I ejaculated. "Her ladyship would not come to you—neither would I trifle so insultingly with her as to bear such a message."

Judge not too hastly, young maiden," answered the gipsy: "did I not ere now speak words which made a chord vibrate in your heart?—and think you not therefore, that I who know so many things and so many persons, may have an interest in obtaining speech of the lovely lady of that house in which you reside? I tell you that the lady *will* come if you present this to her as a token of my sincerity in requiring her presence."

Thus speaking the old gipsy plucked a large and beautiful blooming white rose which grew wild amidst the odoriferous briers in the bushes hard by. I mechanically took the flower from her hand,—gazing on her the while with the most bewildered astonishment. And well might I be thus surprised!—well to might that wonderment be mingled with a sort of dismay!—for it suddenly seemed as if the same species of talisman which had proved so effectual in reducing St. Clair to

abject powerlessness, was now to prove the means of bringing forth Lady Lilla Essendine in obedience to the summons of this miserable wrinkled old gipsy.

"Do not ask me any questions, sweet maiden," she continued, observing my astonishment, although doubtless very far from suspecting the cause, "It is no idle mummery on my part; and I repeat it is so simple a boon I crave, that you cannot in your amiable generosity refuse to grant it. I might have just now addressed myself to the old gardener whom I saw at work in the grounds of the villa: but he looked a churl—and he would only have had threats of the constable, the magistrate, and the House of Correction for the poor gipsy."

"I will do your bidding," I said: and hastened away from the spot.

I had given this answer on the impulse of the moment: but as I reached the garden gate, I repented the haste with which I had acceded to the old gipsy's demand. My first thought was to put Lady Lilla to the test, and see whether the presentation of a flower would have upon her any effect similar to that which it produced on Edwin St. Clair. If so, I fancied that it must lead to explanations: she could not leave me any longer in the dark upon the subject; and I should have an opportunity of mentioning the other topic which was equally prominent in my thoughts: namely, that which related to the fragment of the letter. But as I was returning for this purpose, the thought stole into my brain that if this were a mere silly trick on the old crone's part, it would really be insulting to Lady Lilla Essendine to deliver her such a message.

I re-entered the garden slowly, still irresolute how to act: but scarcely had I threaded the shrubbery, when I met her ladyship.

"I was seeking you, my dear Ellen," she said. "I have finished my letters—my time is now at your disposal—But you have a beautiful flower there?—and it is a wild one too!"

"Yes," I answered, hesitatingly and in confusion, "it was given to me by an old gipsy:"—and I scarcely knew what I was saying.

"An old gipsy?" ejaculated Lady Lilla: and it was with so sudden a start that she spoke, I felt convinced in a moment there was indeed something in the message of which I was the bearer.

"Yes," I responded, now determined to deliver that message, "she is in the lane, just at the turning; and—and—she beseeches a few minutes' interview with your ladyship."

Lady Lilla's countenance, naturally pale, grew all in an instant absolutely ghastly. That animation and polish which, as I have before said, seemed to supply the place of the blushing glow of health, fled from her cheeks, which became of a dull, deadly white. Her lips too turned ashy; and for a moment methought she staggered as if stricken a blow.

"And that flower, Ellen?" she said, or rather gasped forth.

"The old gipsy bade me present it to your ladyship," I answered, "as a token—"

"Oh! how silly and foolish this is!" exclaimed Lilla; visible exerting an almost preterhuman power to regain her self-possession; while she endeavoured to smile away the whole proceeding, as if it were but a trifle and a jest—though that attempt at smiling was of sickly ghastliness. "You will begin to fancy," she continued, "that there

is a subtle magic in flowers——But I will indulge the crone—I will see to what extent she has the impudence to carry her mirth! Await my return in the garden."

Thus speaking Lady Lilla Essendine hurried away from me, and was at once lost to my view in the mazes of the shrubbery. I remained riveted to the spot: a sensation crept over me as if I were becoming unwillingly yet irresistibly involved in some dark unhallowed mysteries. The misgivings which had been previously agitating in my mind in respect to her ladyship, were strengthened; and I felt as if I were afraid of her. What could it all mean?—what deep mystic power did the simple presentation of a rose convey?—and was *she* subject to precisely the same influence as that which had shed its spell in so appalling a manner upon Edwin St. Clair? I felt dispirited and unhappy: I wished that I had never accepted Lady Lilla's invitation—but that I had accompanied the Normans to the seaside, where I knew them to be enjoying themselves; for I had received a letter from Juliet that very morning.

I moved slowly away from the spot; I walked through the garden—I wondered what at that moment was progressing between the old witch and her ladyship. I was not however long left alone; for in a few minutes I heard light footsteps approaching from behind: I turned and beheld Lady Lilla advancing along the gravel-walk. Smiles were upon her countenance: she accosted me gaily, exclaiming, "That old gipsy wanted to tell my fortune! Of course I disposed of her quickly.—But how pensive and sad you look, my dear Ellen! Surely the crone did not dare presage evil in respect to yourself?"

"No, my lady—no," I answered, "But do you not feel—does it not strike you—that it must seem to me most remarkable——"

"Ah, my dear friend, I understand you!" cried Lilla. "You are abandoning yourself to the impressions of coincidences! Why, you cannot seriously imagine that there is any connexion between the means I placed in your possession of overawing St. Clair, and this silly freak of an old gipsy? Truly you astonish me?"

Lady Lilla's merriment pealed forth with a sound of so much melodious heartiness, that for an instant I was staggered; and then I thought within myself that it must be a mere coincidence after all. I had never seen her more gay: I could not possibly believe that this gaiety was feigned on her part; and therefore I had no pretext for further comment on that topic. But I was on the very point of mentioning the other subject: namely, the one in reference to the fragment of the letter and her own handwriting, when some lady-visitors drove up in their carriage to the gate. These were friends whom I had seen before. A party was formed to visit the Zoological Gardens in the neighbourhood: those ladies returned with us to dinner; and as they did not take their leave until somewhat a late hour, I had no further opportunity of conversing alone that day with Lady Lilla Essendine.

But on retiring to rest, I again reviewed all those topics which had been troubling me. Could it have been a mere delusion on my part when I fancied that on first mentioning the old gipsy, Lady Lilla Essendine had turned so ghastly white? and was I contemplating her at the time only through the medium of the distorting mirror of my own morbid sensa-

tions? As for what the gipsy had told me relative to the tall, slender, handsome young man,—I attached no more importance to it than that it had vividly reminded me of my cousin Harry,—with whose description, in its slightly outlined sketch, it happened to correspond. But this I knew to be accidental: she had spoken in the wonted jargon of gipsies, who invariably promise tall, dark haired, slender lovers to the silly girls who are foolish enough to listen to them.

My sleep that night was uneasy and feverish. When I awoke in the morning, I found her ladyship's maid in my room; and on enquiring what o'clock it was, I learnt that it was half an hour later than my wonted time for rising. I had lain so long awake, with the occupation of my thoughts, in the early part of the night, that I had slumbered heavily during the latter portion.

"If you please, miss," said the maid, "her ladyship begs your acceptance of this present. It was ordered for you two or three days ago—but only arrived last evening; and her ladyship had not then an opportunity of placing it in your hands."

It was a jewel casket, containing an elegant gold watch and chain, a beautiful pair of earrings, two rings, a brooch, and a wreath of pearls. The maid directed my attention to an inscription inside the watch, and which described it as "A tribute of friendship to Miss Percy, from Lady Lilla Essendine." The value of the casket's contents could not have been much under a hundred guineas.

I was at first sorry that her ladyship had made me this present, because it disarmed me of my intention of speaking to her on the subject of the fragment of the letter. How could I possibly say anything disagreable to one who was overwhelming me with kindness? But a little reflection imparted a more satisfactory tenour to my thoughts. Must not Lady Lilla, I asked myself, possess an excellent heart that where she formed a friendship she delighted to give so many proofs of it? Could such a woman possibly possess a bad heart? must not her disposition be in every respect admirable? and might I not therefore have been all the while wronging her with the most unjust suspicions? Again, was it generous on my part to be so hasty, as I had been, in leaping at conclusions so prejudicial to the character of one who was striving her best to afford me proof of love and friendship? At events I came to the conclusion that I must remain silent for the present in respect to the *one* topic on which I had been so anxious to speak to Lady Lilla; and I must thenceforth be guided by circumstances.

On joining her at the breakfast-table, I proffered my warmest thanks for her kindness towards me; and she said so many affectionate things, with an air of so much sincerity, that I was confirmed in my resolve of avoiding at even the remotest chance of giving her pain by hinging at a suspicion which might prove to be utterly unfounded.

A fortnight passed from the date of the incidents which I have just been describing. I had now been three weeks at Claremont Villa, and another week's sojurn was to complete my visit. The Norman would then return—I was to rejoin them—the theatre would reopen—and I was to make my next appearance before the public in the character of the heroine in Romeo and Juliet. During these three weeks which had thus already elapsed I had called

twice upon Melissa Harrison, and had found that her health was improving. I now proposed to pay her a third visit; and I availed myself of an opportunity when Lady Lilla Essendine had to make a call at no great distance from the neighbourhood where my invalid friend dwelt.

Having passed nearly an hour with Melissa on the occasion to which I refer, I was returning to the house where I had parted from her ladyship, and where I was to rejoin her,—when I encountered Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe. The young nobleman made me a most courteous salutation, and stopped to converse. The reader is already aware that he had formed an attachment for my friend Juliet Norman: and the sort of courtship he was paying her, had been progressing for about six or seven months—though up to the time when the vacation commenced he had not made any direct proposal: for Juliet had told me previous to her departure for Ramsgate, that she was both perplexed and distressed on that account. He was an exceedingly handsome young man, with dark hair and eyes, and a fine profile: he was not as yet two and-twenty years of age; and as I have already stated, was the son of the Earl of Carshalton.

"Miss Percy," he said, as I encountered him on taking my departure from Melissa's lodgings, "I am rejoiced that I have met you! You can do me a favour."

"I, my lord?" I exclaimed, for a moment taken by surprise; but then it immediately struck me that the service he required might be something in reference to Juliet.

"Yes, Miss Percy," he responded, —"a very great favour, I can assure you! But have you not heard from Miss Norman lately?"—and methought he looked both confused and anxious as he hurriedly put the question.

"I have received three or four letters from her," I rejoined, "during the time we have been separated and the last reached me yesterday morning."

"And did she say nothing——But I see she did not!" exclaimed Lord Frederick. "It was as well;—and I am grateful! But would you, Miss Percy, kindly undertake to enclose to your friend Juliet a note from me in the next letter which you may be sending her?—and if it were by to-day's post I should be all the better pleased."

I was instantaneously struck by the conviction that something unpleasant must have occurred in respect to Lord Frederick's courtship: but I was at a loss to conjecture what it could possibly be. I therefore said in a guarded manner, "Your lordship must know whether you have Miss Norman's consent to correspond with her, and whether her parents have sanctioned such correspondence: for I think I know Juliet well enough to be assured that she would do nothing without the concurrence of her father and mother."

"Do not force me into explanations, Miss Percy!" exclaimed Ravenscliffe, who seemed very much troubled and excited; "but pray render me the service which I entreat at your hands. It is a simple one for you to perform——"

"My lord," I interrupted him, "there is something so singular in the demand that I cannot comply with it. I owe so much to Mr. and Mrs. Norman that not for worlds would I do anything that might in any way vex or displease them. It is evident that you seek to initiate a clandestine correspondence; and

in this endeavour I cannot possibly become an accomplice."

Lord Ravenscliffe loved distressed; and he was evidently hesitating in what manner he could continue to urge his entreaty—when I, thinking that the interview ought not to be prolonged, bowed and passed on. He did not follow; and as I hastened to rejoin Lilla Essendine, I was lost in conjecture as to the cause of the young nobleman's request.

I should observe that Juliet in her first letter from Ramsgate had stated that Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe had gone down to that watering-place likewise; but in her subsequent communications she had not mentioned his name. This had not struck me as singular at the time: but now I could not help thinking that a rupture must have taken place between the young nobleman and herself. At all events I was satisfied with the part I had just performed; for I knew that if Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe's correspondence with Juliet were agreeable to herself and her parents, the medium of the post was as open to him as to myself.

The remaining week which I had to spend at Claremont Villa, passed without any incident worthy of mention; and when the day came for my departure, I warmly expressed my gratitude for all Lilla's kindnesses towards me.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BOUQUET.

On returning to Hunter Street, I was cordially received by my friend the Normans, who had arrived on the previous evening from Ramsgate. It immediately struck me however that Juliet had not benefited by the month's change of air; for she looked pale—she was out of spirits—and there was about her a languor which altered with restlessness, both being very far from affected. I saw likewise that Mr. and Mrs. Norman occasionally looked furtively at their daughter; but these glances were replete with a certain degree of anxiety; and they then exchanged regards with each other, in a manner that was significant of some cause for sorrow. Being convinced that Lord Frederick was in some way connected with all this, I did not mention his name: nor was he once alluded to by the Normans in my presence.

It was in the afternoon when I returned to Hunter Street: we sat conversing in the drawing-room until dinner-time; and it was not before we retired for the night that I found an opportunity of being alone with Juliet. She then accompanied me to my chamber, and throwing herself with an air of mingled languor and distress into an easy chair, she said, "Oh, Ellen! I have so longed for this moment to come that I might talk to you in confidence!"

"I see, dear Julie," I replied, "that there is something hanging upon your mind."

"Yes—I am indeed very, very unhappy!" cried poor Juliet; and then the tears began trickling down her cheeks.

I embraced her, saying everything I could think of to impart consolation, without seeming to conjecture the cause of her distress; for I preferred that she should take the initiative in the discourse which I saw must ensue.

"You know not how my feelings have been outraged," she continued suddenly wiping away her tears, and now speaking with a certain bitterness of tone and indignant pride of

look. "I will tell you everything Ellen! I am about to speak of Ravenscliffe. You know how for months past he has paid his attentions to me; and I need not remind you that has assiduities were conducted in so delicate manner I had a right to expect—you know what I mean—that his intentions were honourable."

"Good heavens, Juliet!" I exclaimed, as a conjecture flashed in unto my brain: "you would not have me understand that he dared address you in any other strain than that which was consistent with his own behaviour as a gentleman and with the prudence of your conduct?"

"Alas, Ellen! I mean that he has done so! But listen to me," continued Juliet. "It was with the consent of my parents that he visited at the house: and it would be a ridiculous affectation to deny that they were pleased when they perceived that I was the object of his attentions. Though only a second son, he has an independent property of his own, left him by a deceased relative; and being of age, he is the master of his actions. Heaven knows," proceed Juliet, again weeping, "I have not loved him from selfish motives! Had he possessed nothing, it would have been all the same—though I do not deny that even while I gave him my heart, my ambition was flattered by the idea of becoming the wife of a titled patrician. Before we went to Ramsgate he said that he should have the pleasure of meeting us there; and accordingly, on our arrival, the first visit we received was from Lord Frederick. I told you in a letter that he was there. He was staying at an hotel: he had his horses and servants with him but he appeared to take no pleasure in anything when away from us—may I not more correctly say, when away from *me*? One day—we had not been a fortnight at Ramsgate—when on calling at our lodgings as usual, he happened to find me alone. Then for the first time did his lips avow that love which his attentions had long displayed; and oh, Ellen! you will not think me foolish when I tell you that it was the happiest moment of my life. He continued to address me in the most impassioned strain: he declared that he could not live without me——But oh! I dare not dwell upon this portion of the dream in which I had cradled myself!"

Juliet again spoke with bitterness: but the tears were trickling down her cheeks; and I was profoundly affected.

"I abandoned myself, as it were," she presently continued, "to the ecstatic pleasure of listening to language which bowed like the most delicious music upon my ear, and the effect of which was to bathe my soul in a fount of elysian bliss. But gradually methought this language of his began to flow in a channel which aroused my misgivings; and because I listened in the most painful doubt and bewilderment, he no doubt fancied that I was yielding to his persuasion. He spoke out more plainly: his words became bolder, yet still remaining full of tenderness. He told me that his parents would never consent to his union with one who had figured upon the stage—and that he dared not offend them, for that in a pecuniary sense he was more under their power than the world generally imagined. He then spoke lightly of the marriage ceremony.—In short, Ellen," added Juliet with an almost suffocating sob of anguish, "he besought me to leave my

home—and-and—live with him as a mistress."

I was not altogether unprepared for such a revelation; and yet I felt shocked when it was made. I threw myself into Juliet's arms, and again said every thing I could think of to console her. Then disengaging myself from her embrace, I contemplated her; and as I looked at her superbly-modelled form—her handsome countenance—her dark hair—her magnificent eyes, of deep violet blue—her splendid teeth—and her long and arching neck—when I thought too of her polished manners and her lady like deportment, and remembered that she was in the glory of that youthful beauty, being not yet twenty years of age—I could not help exclaiming, "Oh, the wretched pride of these haughty aristocratic families!—a pride which interferes with the best feelings of the heart!—for I feel convinced that if it were not for this deplorable influence, Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe would be rejoiced to make you his bride!"

"Ah, my dear Ellen," responded Juliet, with deepest mournfulness, "that dream is now over. Is it necessary for me to tell you how I acted when the frightful conviction could no longer be kept away from my mind and I knew that I was listening to the insidious language of a selfish and unprincipled young man? I ordered him from my presence; he threw himself at my feet, imploring my pardon—he gave vent to the most impassioned ejaculations of despair—but I told him it was too late! He caught my hand—he pressed it to his lips: I tore it away from him—I burst from the room! Oh! when in the solitude of the chamber, I thought that my heart would break! He quitted the house: and when my parents returned from their walk, I told them everything. Nothing could exceed my mother's grief—my father's indignation: and they bitterly reproached themselves for having encouraged the visits of Lord Frederick. My father sent him a letter, desiring that he would come to the house no more; and the next day we heard that he had left Ramsgate. In my correspondence with you, dear Ellen, I did not mention these things—because I knew that you would be distressed, and I did not choose that my sorrows should interfere with your enjoyments. And then too it was a subject on which I could not bring myself to write calmly; I preferred waiting till we met, when I might give you my confidence—as I have now given it. Lord Frederick wrote to me from London. I knew his handwriting; and I gave the letter, unopened, to my father,—who returned it by the next post. Then came a letter to my mother; *that* likewise was sent back unopened. And now, Ellen, I have told you all!"

"But I, dear Juliet, have something to communicate;"—and I proceeded to describe the interview which had taken place between myself and Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe a week back.

Juliet listened with the most anxious attention; and when I had finished, she exclaimed, "You acted well, Ellen—no doubt you acted well! But who knows—who knows," she continued, with feverish excitement, "but that he is sincerely penitent—that it was in a moment of aberation he addressed me in such a strain—and that he would now willingly by his conduct make every possible atonement?"

"You love him then, Juliet?" I said in a gentle voice, as I bent over her: "you still love him—very, very dearly?"

Her handsome countenance drooped down almost to her very bosom, as she murmured in a tone that was scarcely audible, "Yes—I love him very, very dearly!"

The sympathy that I experienced for my unhappy friend, was expressed by a profound sigh.

"Oh! I have endeavoured," exclaimed Miss Norman, suddenly lifting up her countenance towards me, "to triumph over this love of mine, and to shut out from my heart an image which I feel to be unworthy of that sanctuary. But my attempt has been in vain. Oh, yes,—I love him! Would that I could take refuge in my pride—my dignity!—but I cannot. My mind is not powerful enough for that effort. No child ever wept more bitterly for the loss or destruction of some favourite toy, than I have wept, Ellen, for the loss of that hope which was so bright, and the destruction of that dream which was so beautiful! I feel as if all my happiness were gone—as if the very taste for existence itself were dead within me. Ah! do not deem me foolish! I would be wise if I could: but to be wise, in such a case, one must be strong—and I confess that I have not this strength! No, no—I am very, very unhappy!"

Juliet was now weeping piteously; and I had no longer any words wherewith to console her. But she herself again caught at that source of consolation at which she had previously clutched; and she exclaimed passionately, "My father and mother did wrong to return those letters! The insult was immense; but there was an atonement which, if offered, need to have been refused. Perhaps he may have reflected to himself that he could value and esteem me all the more as wife, since my virtue had prevented me from becoming his mistress!"

"My dear friend," I answered, "if Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe be sincere in offering that atonement to which you have alluded, rest assured that he will discover the means. Though by letter he has failed in communicating with your parents, yet may be charge some mutual friend to become the bearer of a message to which Mr. and Mrs. Norman will not at least turn a deaf ear."

"Oh, a thousand thanks, Ellen, for that suggestion—that hope!" exclaimed Juliet, now embracing me with fervour. "Yes—yes! rest assured Frederick will prove himself worthy of my love! And that one fault—the transient aberration—Oh, I can forgive it!"

I considered it would be cruel to destroy the hope in which Juliet was thus cradling herself—though I must confess that I had little faith in it. She now bade me "Good night;" and it was in a far better frame of mind, if not with positive joyousness, that she issued from my chamber.

On the following evening I reappeared at the theatre in the character of Juliet. The beautiful drama of Shakespere had always been a favourite one of mind, even when at my aunt's I had been wont study a select edition of the great author's works, and when I had little dreamt that I myself should ever appear upon the stage. I had already once enacted the part of Juliet: it was my third performance—and the dramatic critics had spoken well of it. But while as Lady Lilla Essendine's I had reflected far more maturely on the niceties the peculiarities, and the intricacies, so to speak, of that part: I had identified myself with the feelings of the heroine throughout her brief but

romantic and deeply-interesting career; and I was now confident that I could develop all the power of the pathos, so to speak, which belonged to the character, more effectively than I had previously done. The house was crowded to suffocation; and I recognised Lady Lilla Essendine, with a group of friends, in one box—the Parkses and some of their acquaintances in another—Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe, with several young gentlemen, in a third. Methought for an instant that St. Clair might likewise be present: I assuredly had no inclination to see him there; nor did my looks, as I swept them round the vast semicircle, encounter him.

I was full of confidence: I experienced not the slightest tremor on this occasion. My memory was clear as the most crystal water is transparent; I moved, and felt, and thought only as Juliet Capulet. My success was immense; and as each disappearance from the scene elicited fresh and heightenedoutbursts of applause, I had the conviction that I had succeeded in touching the feelings of the audience as I had intended to move them. All this is not vanity, gentle reader: it is an indispensable portion of my narrative; and I confess that I was elated—I was exultant: I feel convinced that wine never produced upon the heart of man such an exhilaration of the senses as that which I enjoyed in the hour of my brilliant triumph. But it was chiefly in that deeply-pathetic scene where I had to appear with the drugged phial and the pointed dagger that the result was most effective: the sobs of many of the ladies were audible from the boxes; and they were natural tears which flowed down my own cheeks. I was as completely Juliet Capulet *then*, as if the great bard's tragedy were a true one, and my spirit, disembodied from the form that bore the name of Ellen Percy or Miss Trafford, had been transfused into that of the heroine of the drama. When the curtain fell at the conclusion of the piece, Mr. and Mrs. Norman both, with sincerest enthusiasm, hailed me as "a great actress;" and their daughter with no less fervour echoed the welcome. Mr. Richards, the lessee of the theatre, was all bows, congratulations, and politeness; and I could not help mentally contrasting his present demeanour with his patronising and somewhat supercilious bearing towards me on the occasion when I appeared humbly before him to give a specimen of my abilities. I was loudly called for on the part of the audience; and when I was led on the stage before the curtain, much of my native timidity and bashfulness returned: I was no longer Juliet in the drama—but was reduced to a consciousness of my own identity; and not even the flush of success and the glow of triumph could lift me completely above that feeling of embarrassment and confusion. The applause was immense; and bouquets were showered upon me, numerous voices intimating that I must look inside those nosegays of flowers.

I did not comprehend what these words meant until after I had retired to my dressing-room, where all bouquests were brought to me in a large tray as they had been gathered up from the stage by some of the theatrical underlings. Mr. and Mrs. Norman had to appear in the next piece: and they had therefore left me to make suitable changes in their own toilets; for they had borne parts in "Romeo and Juliet." I was now alone with Miss Norman and her maid, who attended upon us both. Thinking however that Mrs. Norman might need the assistance

of the maid. I bade her proceed to that lady's dressing room; and thus I was now entirely alone with Juliet, who was not to appear until the ballet.

"Let us look at the bouquets!" exclaimed Miss Norman, when the tray had been deposited on the table. "You will find some handsome presents here, Ellen?"

"Presents?" I repeated, struck by the conjecture that her words had a meaning beyond a bare allusion to the flowers themselves.

"Yes," she replied. "Did you hear several voices bid you look inside the nosegays?"

"I remember! But is it possible——"

"So possible," cried Juliet, as she opened the first bouquet she took up, "that here is a beautiful diamond ring carefully attached by a ribbon to the stem of this rose. That came from some fair finger; but it shall adorn a fairer one. And here, in this bouquet, is a bracelet—a magnificent one, and massive too! The gift is generous—though it might have come in inconvenient concussion against your flesh. What have we here, enveloped so carefully in this piece of satin, and fastened with a pink ribbon to the spray of the moss rose? Another diamond ring! —with the inscription on the satin; *To the great tragedian*'—Ellen, my dear Ellen, you are already famous!"

"But what is this?' I said, now taking up a bouquet as an excuse to bend over it to conceal the blushes of mingled triumph and confusion, pride and modesty, that were upon my cheeks. "A note? And it is addressed to you, Juliet?"

"Ah!" she ejaculated: and then, as she took the note from my hand, she added, "it is from Ravenscliffe!"

"You will not open it?" I said, somewhat offended at the manner in which he thus sought to render me the instrument as it were of conveying a billet to the young lady whose feeling he had so outraged.

But the next instant I was almost sorry for the words I had spoken—because, as I looked up at Juliet, I saw that her handsome countenance had become perfectly radiant with joy, and then a sudden mournfulness seized upon it—a mournfulness which my speech had shed like a blight upon the rose.

"Or at least," I immediately added, "you will only open it in Mrs. Forman's presence?"

I noticed that a powerful struggle was taking place in Juliet's bosom: the colour came and went in rapid transitions upon her cheeks, and after some hesitation, she said reproachfully, "Oh, Ellen! if it were *you*, I would not be so harsh!"

"Dearest Juliet," I cried, acutely pained by that species of reproach which had just issued from her lips, "believe me—Oh; believe me, that in a moment when I have every reason to be overwhelmed with joy, I would more than ever give much to be enabled to infuse happiness into your heart. If you think therefore——"

"At all events," said Miss Norman, "I shall be reading it in your presence; and I pledge myself that, whatever it may contain, I will place this billet in the hands of my parents."

"Then open it, Juliet," I said.

Her superb violet eyes flashed upon me a glance of unspeakable gratitude; and the next instant the billet was open in her hand. It evidently contained but a few words—for at a glance she read them; and with a cry of joy she rank upon a seat.

"Read it, dear Ellen read— it!"

she exclaimed; and she handed me the note, the contents of which were as follow:—

"Pardon me, dearest Juliet, for an offence which I have bitterly deplored ever since it was committed. Be mine!—become my wife—accept my hand!

"Yours ever faithfully and devotedly,

"FREDERICK RAVENSCLIFFE."

"I congratulate you, Juliet," I said, embracing her with fervour.

"Oh! I knew that he would make every atonement," she said, trembling with joy: and perhaps never and she look more truly handsome than at that moment. "Ah! cannot I now forgive him for that *one* offence? Oh, yes!—and my parents will likewise accord him their forgiveness!"

For some time we conversed together upon this change in Juliet's prospects—so that the bouquets were awhile forgotten. I no longer felt hurt at Ravenscliffe's conduct with respect to the mode he had adopted in conveying the billet to my friend; I was exceedingly happy on her account; and I had no difficulty in agreeing with her that the young nobleman's past offence was atoned for. I was all the more rejoiced too, inasmuch as I had been agreeably disappointed in this result of Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe's proceeding with reference to Miss Norman. But these reflections were at the instant only hastily made.

We now resumed our examination of the bouquets; and out of some fifty or sixty which had been thrown upon the stage, ten or a dozen contained present of more or less value—some few being even costly. When I returned home that night, I insisted upon making my friends the Normans the sharers of my presents; but nothing could induce Mr. and Mrs. Norman to accept anything from me. It was even with difficulty I persuaded them to allow me to place a ring on Juliet's finger, or that she would take it. Then, in my presence, did she present to her parents the billet she had received from Lord Ravenscliffe—requesting me to explain the circumstances in which it had been conveyed to her. This narrative I at once gave—omitting however the remonstrance I had in the first instance breathed against Juliet's opening the missive. This deficiency she generously hastened to make good; so that I received the approving and grateful looks of her parents.

"I cannot reproach you, my dear child," said Mr. Norman, affectionately addressing his daughter, "for having opened the billet in the presence of your excellent friend, Ellen. Nor need I ask," he added slyly, at the same time tenderly caressing Juliet's dark hair, "what reply is to be sent to Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe.

"By his present honourable conduct," said Mrs. Norman, "he make every possible reparation for his temporary misbehaviour."

I could not help reflecting, now that I had leisure for such meditation, that there must have been a sad want of principle on the part of the young nobleman to seek to seduce Juliet from the paternal care, and that he could not be altogether unpractised in the insidious language of which he had made use—especially when he had spoken so lightly of the marriage tie. I could not therefore altogether reconcile myself to the belief that he was certain to make a good husband. But it was not for me to throw a damp upon the spirits of those kind friends who were happy, nor to constitute myself a prophetess of evil. Before we retired to rest that

night, Mr. Norman intimated his intention of communicating which Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe in the morning.

This he accordingly did immediately after breakfast on the ensuing day; and as there were no rehearsals to be attended, the time was at the Normans disposal for the expected interview with his lordship. Precisely at one o'clock the young nobleman's handsome phaeton drove up to the door; and from behind the curtain of the drawing-room window Juliet beheld him alight. I was alone with her in that apartment; for her parents were waiting to receive him in the first instance in a parlour down-stairs. Their interview with him lasted for upwards of half-an-hour, during which time poor Juliet was a prey to the most anxious suspense. Could any be wrong? was he failing to satisfy her parents of his honourable intentions—of his contrition for the past—or of his ability to maintain a wife? I assured her over and over again that I felt convinced she had nothing to apprehend on these points: or else Lord Frederick would neither have written the billet, nor have come in answer to Mr. Norman's summons, but I suggested that her parents were doubtless proceeding with suitable caution. At length hasty steps were heard ascending or rather—rushing up the stairs; the door burst open; and the young nobleman flung himself of Juliet's feet.

I retreated from the apartment; for I knew that the lovers would prefer being alone together, and that they had much to say. There was forgiveness to be solicited and the assurance thereof to be returned: there were doubtless plans to be discussed and settled for the future. I went down-stairs, and joined Mr. and Mrs. Norman, who had remained in the parlour. Methought on my entrance they were in serious deliberation together; and I was on the point of withdrawing from that room also, when Mrs. Norman bade me remain.

"We have no secrets from you, Ellen," she said; "and moreover you must assist as bridemaid at the ceremony which is soon to take place—though under circumstances sufficiently private and indeed secret as to divest the event itself of half the joy and satisfaction which as Juliet's parents we should otherwise experience."

I was both surprised and pained at the language which I thus heard: for it struck me as an evil omen, in addition to my previous gloomy presages, with regard to the wedded life on which my beloved friend Juliet was, as it appeared, speedily to enter.

"But after all," said Mr. Norman, with the visible effort of one straining and striving to reconcile himself to something which was nevertheless not quite so agreeable as it might be—"but after all, Ravenscliffe explained himself very frankly. You know, Ellen, that he is the second son of the Earl and Countess of Carshalton: there is no name in the peerage more ancient than this title—there is no family in the whole range of aristocracy more proud than that which bears it. Now, we must not blind ourselves to the fact that there *is* in certain quarters a prejudice—"

"But look at our Juliet!" exclaimed Mrs. Norman, with all a mother's pride: "is she not superbly handsome? where will you see a finer grown young woman?"

"And she is amiable, and good, and well mannered," I interjected; "and in every respect worthy to become a nobleman's wife, if the

ridiculous prejudices of society were set aside."

"However," said Mrs. Norman, "of course poor Lord Frederick cannot help those prejudices, as they are entertained by his father and mother; and he has explained himself, as Mr. Norman has just stated, so frankly—he spoke with so much sincerity—that it was impossible to avoid yielding to his arguments, his entreaties, and his representations."

"But while we are thus commenting upon the matter," said Mr. Norman, "Ellen continues in ignorance of the arrangements that have been made, as well as the motives for making them. You must know, Ellen, the world has hitherto been mistaken relative to Lord Frederick's pecuniary position. A deceased relation left him a sum of money in the funds, producing about three thousand a year—but on condition that he was not to marry before the age of twenty-three without his parents' consent—it being doubtless supposed that by the time he should have attained that period of life, his mind would be sufficiently formed and his experiences enlarged enough to allow him to cater for his own happiness."

"And if," interjected Mrs. Norman, "he should contract a marriage contrary to his parents' wishes before the age of twenty-three, the money so bequeathed by his deceased relative is to pass into other hands. Is it not so my dear?"

"The matter stands as you have described it," rejoined Mr. Norman. "Now it is quite certain, my dear Ellen," he continued, "that the Earl and Countess of Carshalton will *not* give their consent in the present instance—"

"Then why not wait," I exclaimed, "until Lord Frederick shall be three and twenty and his own master?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Norman, with a sigh, "because Lord Frederick is madly enamoured of our Juliet; and the period of eighteen months which he would have to wait, appeared a perfect age to him. I can well understand his feelings. And then too, there is no denying the fact, Ellen, that so prolonged a courtship would have its inconveniences and its risks. Juliet could not continue on the stage when once formally plighted to Lord Frederick and our means would be seriously curtailed by the loss of her salary. Not but that we would make any sacrifice for our dear girl—There is however another consideration; and this is that the ardour of love may cool in a prolonged courtship; and it would be a terrible blow to Juliet's happiness, if, after all, Lord Frederick should change his mind and break of the match."

"Besides," added Mrs. Norman, "it would be useless to seek to disguise from you, Ellen, that situated as we are—wanting to give our dear daughter a position—this match is a very eligible one—I may even say brilliant. She acquires a title—though for eighteen months she may not bear it—"

"In a word," ejaculated Mr. Norman, "we have yielded to Lord Frederick's entreaty that the marriage shall take place with the utmost privacy. When once his twenty-third year is attained, and the money in the funds is finally and irrevocably made over to him by the trustees, he may boldly proclaim his marriage without the necessity of concealing the date of it; and thus our dear child's reputation cannot possibly suffer in the long run, whatsoever temporary little inconvenience may arise from this secret—and I may say clandestine

union. Everything, therefore, is settled according to Lord Frederick's desire; and though one could have wished that it were otherwise in a certain sense, yet we cannot in this world expect everything to run precisely with our inclinations."

"The marriage will take place in about a fortnight," resumed Mrs. Norman: "it will of course be solemnized by special license—and none but ourselves will be present."

"But the clergyman?" I suggested: "how will you ensure *his* secrecy? He might possibly betray the affair to the Earl of Carshalton before it is too late to recede—"

"Lord Frederick has undertaken to provide against that casualty," said Mr. Norman. "He is acquainted with a clergyman—a poor curate in some distant country—on whom he can rely; and by this reverend gentleman will the nuptial blessing be pronounced. In short, my dear Ellen, every arrangement is finally settled; and Juliet's mother and myself have done our best to ensure our child's happiness. Ah! by the bye, I forgot to mention that Lord Frederick has a beautiful little place—a mere cottage, but singularly picturesque in its situation amidst the few acres of pleasure-grounds belonging to it—it is only a few miles distant from London—and it is there that the ceremony is to be performed. The happy pair will immediately go upon the Continent, under circumstances of the strictest privacy, to pass the honeymoon: we shall pretext a visit that Juliet is paying to a relation in the country; and on her return she will come back to us, until the time when Lord Frederick may no longer be necessitated to conceal their marriage."

"You forget to add, my dear," said Mrs. Norman, who had sighed more than once during her husband's last speech, "that Lord Frederick just now showed us all the papers connected with the manner in which his fortune was left him. And therefore you see, my dear Ellen," she remarked, turning to me, "that the young nobleman has behaved most straightforward and frankly in the matter, and that he is doing all he can under existing circumstances."

The footman now entered to announce that luncheon was served: and we proceeded to the dining-room, where we were almost immediately joined by Juliet and her noble suitor. I saw at a glance that Miss Norman was completely happy: and it was no wonder—for being deeply enamoured of Lord Frederick, as well as having her ambition gratified by the prospect of sharing his patrician rank, she could easily reconcile herself to the temporary inconvenience of secrecy and privacy in reference to the contemplated marriage. Besides, one who loves thinks only of possessing the object of the heart's adoration; and to ensure this aim even the opinion of the world itself will be defied so long as there is the consciousness that the time will come when everything will be cleared up.

After luncheon I retired to my own chamber, to reflect upon all that I had heard,—leaving the Normans and Lord Frederick together. I by no means approved of the plans that were to be adopted; nor did I conceive that they augured satisfactorily for my friend Juliet's eventual happiness. I considered that in existing circumstances it would have been much more prudent to wait until Lord Frederick was released from all shackles and became his own master. Methought that if his love were of a nature

calculated to ensure Juliet's felicity, it could not possibly be impaired by the ordeal of an additional eighteen months' courtship; but that if, on the other hand, it were of a character to cool down during that interval, it were better that Juliet should altogether renounce the idea of marriage with such an individual. It was not however for me to suggest my advice, much less to proclaim my misgivings to Mr. and Mrs. Norman, who were the best judges—or at least the most rightful and natural ones—of the means most calculated to ensure their daughter's welfare; and as for starting a presentiment, a presage, or an objection to throw a damp on Juliet's happiness, I could not do such a thing! One fact was clear enough,—that Mr. and Mrs. Norman, with all their good qualities in other respects, were bringing themselves to strain every point in order to secure a brilliant alliance for their daughter; and as I knew that they loved her devotedly, I could not for a moment suspect otherwise than that they were doing everything for the best. Indeed, it was natural enough that they should be inclined to make some sacrifices for the purpose of giving Juliet a position, which when the time for secrecy should have passsd would be for her a brilliant one.

Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe now became a daily visitor at the house: and Juliet gave up her engagement at the theatre. The Normans began to speak of an elderly female relative who resided at Dover: and it was a fact that they *did* possess such a relation in the person of a Mrs. Oldcastle. This lady was very well off; she had long been a widow: but as she detested the stage and everybody connected with it, she had for years forborn from holding any intercourse with the Normans, Mr. and Mrs. Norman, however, now began to intimate to their friends and visitors that Mrs. Oldcastle had relented—that she had written to them—and that it was in deference to her wishes that Juliet had resigned her engagement as a ballet-dancer. The falsehood was venal enough under the circumstances: but it was a falsehood nevertheless. It however prepared the way to afford a pretext for Juliet's absence from home, and to prevent the slightest suspicion or whispering of scandal.

During the interval of a fortnight which now passed, Juliet was so completely happy that I never could find it in my heart to breathe a single syllable which was calculated to throw a damp upon her sprits; and I was moreover so much occupied with my own dramatic engagements—while she on the other hand was engaged with the preparations for the nuptials—that we had less opportunities for being together than heretofore. It was stated in due course that a letter had been received from Mrs. Oldcastle, inviting Juliet to pass a few weeks with her; and thus those preperations which she was making were accounted for to the servants of the house as well as to the visitors.

In the morning of the day fixed for the nuptials Mr. and Mrs. Norman, Juliet, and myself proceeded in the carriage to London Bridge, as if we were about to embark on board a steamer to have a trip to Gravesend, whence, as Mr. Norman hinted, we were to see Juliet off on the alleged visit to Mrs. Oldcastle at Dover. Thus everything was avoided that could excite the suspicion of the servants; and when the carriage had departed, we repaired to the spot where,

according to previous arrangement, Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe had his own equipage in readiness to receive us. We proceeded to his little villa, which was in the neighbourhood of Blackheath; and I found it quite as picturesque as Mr. Norman had described it. It was small, but elegantly fitted up, and might be denominated a pretty bachelor retreat for a young nobleman who was far from deficient in mental resources. An elderly housekeeper, a valet, and a maid-servant constituted the domestic establishment: Lord Frederick considered them all three to be completely trustworthy; and moreover the two latter were to accompany himself and his bride on their Continental visit. Mr. and Mrs. Norman were evidently struggling against feelings of distress at the prospect of separating from their daughter; and perhaps they could not altogether shut out from their minds the conviction that the bridal might, under other circumstances, have been taking place with less gloomy auspices. Juliet herself was in one sense depressed at the idea of parting from her parents and me; but in another sense she was happy—for she fondly loved Frederick Ravenscliffe, and she had now the fullest confidence in him. The young nobleman appeared radiant with joy: but as for myself I experienced a sadness which I made every effort to conceal.

It was about noon when we reached the Cottage, as it was called; and we rambled about the grounds for some hours. At five o' clock dinner was served up; the ceremony was to take place a little later; and immediately afterwards a post-chaise was to arrive to bear away the happy couple: for Lord Frederick had sent back his own equipage to town, so that the domestics belonging thereto might know nothing of what was in progress. The clergyman had not as yet made his appearance; though Ravenscliffe had expected him to dinner. He however knew that he had already arrived in London—for he had seen him on the previous day; and he felt no apprehension that there would be any disappointment. At about seven o'clock a cab drove up to the gate of the fence which bounded the garden in front of the cottage; and Ravenscliffe, catching a glimpse of its occupant, joyously announced the arrival of his reverend friend, Mr. Crofr.

Mrs. Norman, Juliet, and myself now hastily rose from table, and ascended to a chamber which had been prepared for our reception. The moment had come when the bride was to apparel herself for the departure that was to take place immediately after the solemnization of the ceremony. Her mother could not keep back her tears; and Juliet, throwing herself into her arms, for some minutes wept bitterly. I also wept; and thus the progress of the toilet was suspended. Those tears were however a relief to our surcharged hearts; and Mrs. Norman now exerted every effort to regain her composure. Juliet attired herself in travelling costume; and the rich lace veil thrown over her bonnet—but which was presently to be removed—was the only indication of the bride. She was pale, but eminently handsome; and ere we descended from the chamber, both her mother and myself embraced her fervently, wishing her all possible happiness.

It was now half-past seven o' clock in the evening; and as it was past the middle of August the dusk already beginning to close in

around. On entering the drawing-room, which was on the ground-floor, we found the curtains closed, and wax-lights were burning upon the table. Lord Frederick and Mr. Norman were conversing with Mr. Croft, who was now attired in canonicals. The special license and the little box containing the wedding ring were upon the table near a cushion which supported the prayer-book. My eyes were filled with tears; and therefore the first glimpse which I obtained of the scene, was as if I beheld it through a mist. I did not immediatly catch sight of Mr. Croft's countenance: but when Lord Frederick and Mr. Norman hastened towards us, I passed a kerchief across my eyes and looked at the minister. No language can describe the sensation which took possession of me as my first glance was flung upon that countenance!—words have no faculty to depict the mingled astonishment, and dismay with which I was smitten as an idea struck me! Could it be possible that the face of this clergyman was far from unfamiliar to me?—had I indeed seen it before—and in such circumstances too, the remembrance of which almost made me shriek out? Or was it a delusion on my part? A dimness came over my vision—the lights appeared to pale into a mist—my thoughts fell into confusion—and in respect to those present I could scarcely distinguish them from each other, with the eexception of *one*—that individual in the white surplice, with the scarf flowing in front and the black and red hood at his back!

I remember that Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe introduced Mrs. Norman, Juliet, and myself in our turns to Mr. Croft; and then the ceremony commenced. I advanced mechanically behind Juliet towards the table: I was labouring under a species of stupefaction which to me was like the paralization of every sense—but which to those about me might only have seemed a natural agitation, consistent with the circumstances, and chiefly arising from the prospect of separation from a friend whom I loved as a sister.

The ceremony was already progressing before the dimness passed sufficiently a way from my vision, and before my thoughts settled so far down into collectedness as to enable me to take another look at the surpliced minister. I now gazed upon him intently; and the conviction grew gradually stronger in my mind that I knew his countenance full well. It was changed since I had first seen it nearly eight years back: the hair that was *then* dark, had become grizzled—the black eyes that were *then* piercing, had lost their fire; and there was now an incipient stoop in the tall stature. All this was the difference between the age of about forty and that of nearly fifty: but still the expression of that countenance—Oh! it was the same!—the same as I had first seen it in my grandfather's parlour at Leeds—the same as I had afterwards caught a glimpse of it when looking through the window of the chamber of death! Yes—it was unmistakably the same! But the voice—Oh! I had not yet thought of *that*! And no wonder: for not merely had my senses been hitherto locked as it were in stupefaction, but there was nothing now to startle me with the recollection of that voice. For when I had heard it in my grandfather's parlour nearly eight years back—and then again at Mrs. Parks's residence in London about six years back—it was rough and coarse; whereas now it flowed with a soft solemnity.

"Oh!" I exclaimed within myself, "it is a delusion on my part. Heaven be thanked that it so!"

My heart bounded with joy: for infinite was the relief it thus for an instant experienced;—and at that very moment the ring was placed by the bridegroom on the finger of the bride. Yet only for an instant was this relief on my part: because, as I again looked towards Mr. Coft's countenance, a hurricane of misgivings swept back into my mind. Once more I felt as if I must shriek out; and then all in an instant the thought flashed to me that even if my suspicion were correct, and that the Mr. Croft whom I beheld before me was identical with the stranger of other times, he might be a clergyman after all. Still there was a hideous mystery eveloping all this; and omen appeared to accumulate upon omen most inauspiciously for this bridal that was being celebrated. Scarcely had this reflection passed through my mind, when a particular intonation of the clergyman's voice caused it to relapse as it were into a roughness from which its hitherto softened flow had only been redeemed by an artificial effort; and it seemed to touch a chord that vibrated most painfully through my heart. Again did that dimness come over my vision—again did my thoughts quickly fall into confusion: my strength was ebbing away—consciousness was as it were slipping out of me—and I sank down in a swoon.

When I came back to consciousness, I was lying upon the bed in the chamber where Juliet's toilet had been performed: and Mrs. Norman was bending over me. There was an odour of vinegar in the room: I now remembered that I had fainted: and Mrs. Norman said in a gentle voice, "The scene was too much for you, my sweet Ellen! Oh, I had such difficulty to recover you!"

"Have I been unconscious very long?" I inquired, raising myself with an effort to a sitting posture on the bed.

"Yes—for some time," replied Mrs. "Juliet has gone"—here the poor lady vainly endeavoured to stifle a sob—"but she kissed you fervently, Ellen—she bade me say everything kind! She was loath to leave you thus—Oh! and she wept too—she wept when the last moment came—bitterly did she weep!"

"And it is all over?" I said, with a sudden exclamation as though I would have prevented it if the power to do so still remained.

"Ah! no wonder my dear girl, that yo[illegible]re so painfully affected!" continue[illegible]. Norman, who was now hersel[illegible] weeping bitterly. "You have felt how hard it was to tear yourself away from one whom you loved as a sister; but I, my dear child, have be[illegible] compelled to part from a daughter!"

"Yes, yes—it is hard!" I murmured, almost suffocated with my own sobs; and then I abruptly asked, "But the clergyman, Mr. Croft?"

"He too is gone, my dear Ellen," rejoined Mrs. Norman. "He is compelled to return by a night-coach, it appears, to the country village of which he has the curacy."

"Do you remember the name of it?" I inquired.

"Oh, yes—Embledon," answered Mrs. Norman; "and it is situated in Warwickshire. But what made you ask, my dear child?"

I had a very great mind at that moment to reveal to Mrs. Norman everything that had been oppressing me—the ca[illegible] of my swoon—and the uneasy misgiving which was still floating in my mind: but a

second thought determined me to remain silent. Whether Mr. Croft and the stranger were identical, was one thing; but that he was really a clergyman was another; and as this latter fact seemed to be established beyond doubt, whatsoever I might know of the man (if indeed anything at all) could not affect the legality of the marriage. I consequently made some evasive reply to Mrs. Norman's question; and declaring that I was now better, I descended to the parlour, where her husband was awaiting us.

Mr. Norman had himself evidently been weeping—for he was devotedly attached to his daughter; and I knew how severe a pang it must have cost him to separate from her. We entered a vehicle which was in readiness to receive us; and returned to London. But little was said during the ride, and the house on our arrival, seemed dreary enough without Julia.

CHAPTER XV.

PAISLEY.

ON the following morning I received a letter from my cousin Harry. It was brief and hurriedly written, and conveyed to me a distressing piece of intelligence. My aunt Mrs. Wakefield had been seized with a sudden illness, which evidently excited the greatest apprehensions in the mind of her affectionate son; and he requested that I would hasten to Paisley with all possible despatch—for that such was the earnest prayer of his mother. While my cheeks were still wet with the tears which this letter elicted, I proceeded to show it to Mr. and Mrs. Norman; and the counsel they gave me was in complete accordance with my own inclination and the request contained in that letter. I was to set off for Paisley at once; and my preparations for the journey were quickly made.

I am not about to dwell upon the details of that journey of some hundreds of miles to the great Scotch manufacturing town which is situated a short distance from Glasgow. Suffice it to say that I proceeded with all possible despatch and that I reached my destination without any incident worthy of mention. On my arrival in Paisley, I immediately obtained a guide to carry my box and conduct me to my aunt's address. He led me to the outskirt of the town; and indicating a small but neat cottage residence, which stood isolated in a little garden, informed me that this was my aunt's abode. As we approached the door, a young woman —evidently a servant-maid— was issuing forth; and on perceiving me, accompanied by a man carrying a box, she at once accosted me. I announced my name, and found that I was expected. Then, in suspenseful anxiety, I inquired after my aunt. The domestic shook her head, and the tears started from her eyes, as she faltered forth a few words, which gave me to understand that Mrs. Wakefield was still living but that there was little chance of her recovering. The doctor had just been; and the servant girl was hurrying to his surgery to fetch some medicine which he was desirous that his patient should at once take.

I bade the girl speed on her errand not uselessly waste time by tarrying to announce me. The front door stood open: the porter deposited my box in the passage; and I began to ascend the stairs softly. But I was now almost completely

overwhelmed by affliction. I pictured to myself how great would be the anguish of poor Henry at losing that affectionate mother of whom he was so fond; while I myself felt that a dear relative and a valuable friend might be about to pass away from me. I leant against the wall for support:—already exhausted by my long journey, I was now well nigh crushed completely by mental excruciation.

After thus pausing on the stairs for a few moments, I continued the ascent, and on reaching the little landing on the first floor, my ear caught the sound of voices. The door of the invalid's chamber stood partially open; and it was from the interior of this room that the voices amanated.

"Oh, mother! dearest mother!' I heard Henry exclaim, with a burst of anguish, "do not tell me this—do not tell me that death is to separate us so soon! Oh, no! such a calamity is too frightful, my dear mother!—it is something too dreadful for me to contemplate!"

"My poor boy," replied Mrs. Wakefield, in feeble accents and with an indescribable mournfulness in her tone, "it is better that you should know the worst at once, so that you may prepare yourself for that which is inevitable. Listen to me, my dear Henry! If your cousin comes not ere the last breath waver upon my lips, tell poor Ellen that I bequeathed her my blessing—which was all that I had to leave her! Tell her likewise, Henry, that in my last moments she was not forgotten; and that amongst my last words her name was mentioned. I know that she is a steady and good girl; and I feel convinced that in her capacity of companion to Miss Norman, she is eating the bread of honest industry. But she dwells in a great city, Henry, which is full of voices and temptations; and were she now present, I should bestow upon her my last advice. Tell her, dear Henry, that I should have enjoined her to cling to the simplicity of those habits which she cherished when with us—to avoid costly apparel, no matter how competent her means may be—to attend regularly at a place of worship—and especially to avoid theatres and all those places of public resort——But, Ah! what is that?"

So strong was the burst of anguish with which my cousin Harry had first spoken—and so plaintively mournful was the voice in which his mother had answered him—that I was transfixed to the spot with the overwhelming agony of my own feelings. Then, as my aunt had begun to speak of myself in terms so tender and so loving, I was affected to a degree that I again leant against the wall for support. The tears were raining down my cheeks; and though my sobs were at first inaudible to those within the chamber, they were not the less powerfully convulsing me within my own bosom. I listened to every syllable that fell from the lips of my dying aunt: I was treasuring up the precious counsel thus wafted to my ear, but of which she little thought that I was an auditress; and then all in a moment came that *one* injunction which fell upon me like a blight! Searing, scathing, withering as a lightning-flash, were those words which thus all in an instant carried to my mind the horrible conviction that so far from having a secret to tell which would give satisfaction, the revelation thereof would fill with anguish the heart of the perishing woman! And *then* it was, too, that my convulsing sobs became suddenly audible to the inmates of the chamber, and that

my aunt's speech was broken off by an ejaculation elicited by the sounds which from the threshold of the half-open door abruptly smote her ear.

I advanced into the room with tottering steps, and with vision nearly blinded by the scorching tears that were profusely pouring forth from my eyes; and the next instant I was clasped in my cousin Henry's arms. Then, in a few moments, I was folded in the embrace of my dying aunt; and she wept over me.

I knelt by the couch: my cousin Henry knelt by my side—Mrs. Wakefield bestowed her blessings upon us. But her speech was feeble—her utterance was painful—her words soon grew inarticulate; and, Oh! they mingled with that unmistakable sound which once heard by any one present at the departure of a fellow-creature to the other world, never can be forgotten! It was the death-rattle! I had heard it before—I had heard it on that memorable night when my grandfather died; and I knew that no earthly power could now retard the flight of my perishing aunt's spirit to the unknown mansions that lie beyond the grave.

Full of indescribable anguish were my sobs as I pressed her hand to my lips: but poor Henry—*he* knew not that his mother was already dying! Nevertheless he gave vent to passionate lamentations; for he fancied she was very ill; and recollecting that the girl had gone for the medicine, he suddenly started up, declaring that he himself would speed for it, as he knew that it would do his dear mother good! But at that very instant all was over; and when with a solemn and awful feeling which now predominated over my intense grief, I whispered to him that she was no more, he seemed smitten with a terrific consternation.

But I will not dwell upon this scene: it is one which I must leave to my readers to imagine, and which I myself can never forget. Suffice it to say that it was some time before Henry would believe that his mother's vital breath had passed away beyond all human power of recall, and that he was now utterly an orphan! At length, when he could no longer blind himself to the stupendous fact—when he found that the last wild hope was indeed gone—he gave not vent to lamentations; but he sank into a profound and silent grief.

The funeral took place: and during the five or six days which intervened betwixt the death and the sepulture, but little conversation took place on the part of Henry and myself, though we were almost constantly together. There was only one topic which we could have touched upon: and on this he would rather reflect than discourse. Oh! how deeply was my heart touched when at times I beheld his gaze fixed in a sort of dream-like stupor upon me, as if his lips were about to frame the question—"Is it all a dream? or is this thought which haunts me without ceasing and hangs upon my mind with a leaden weight,—is it a reality?"

The funeral took place, I say; and when my cousin had seen the remains of his beloved mother consigned to the grave, he appeared to arouse himself to the consciousness of existence, and that his existence had its duties. I had superintended all the arrangements for the funeral; for my cousin had hitherto appeared incapable of anything that was calculated to force upon his mind the conviction of the loss

he had sustained. And now he comprehended all that I had done; and he thanked me fervently, while the tears rained down his cheeks.

On the day of the funeral, Mr. Macdonald, the manufacturer in whose service Henry was employed, called at the cottage. He was a kind-hearted man; and he came not merely to condole with Henry Wakefield on the loss he had sustained, but likewise to inquire into his present prospects and offer any assistance which he might be enabled to afford. Mrs. Wakefield had lived upon an annuity purchased by what little was saved from the wrecks of her deceased husband's property; and this annuity had consequently died with her. It however transpired that she had managed by dint of a rigid economy, to save between two and three hundred pounds; and this was all Harry's heritage. Mr. Macdonald, though good-hearted, was worldly-minded: he speedily entered upon business-matters; and it was natural enough that Henry should thankfully accept the counsel of one who stepped forward as a friend. I was not present at the interview: but my cousin afterwards repeated to me everything that took place.

"I know," said Mr. Macdonald, "that change of scene is indispensable for the mind after such a bereavement as this, and that your feeling would not recover their equilibrium so long as you remain in a dwelling where everything recalls the memory of the lost one. You are a good young man; and though you have not been many months in my employment I have taken an interest in you. I have affairs in new York which require the attention of a trustworthy person; and I propose that you should proceed thither on my behalf. You can place your little capital in my hands: and I will lay it out for you to the very best advantage. I do not mean to hurry you away from Paisley, nor to dictate to you. I merely proffer my counsel, and to do that which I conceive best for you under existing circumstances. Your cousin is staying with you; but I believe, from what you have before told me, that she is in a situation enabling her to earn her own livehood?"

Henry replied in the affirmative; and having expressed his most grateful acknowledgments to Mr. Macdonald, he said, "You will permit me to consult my cousin before I give a decisive answer in respect to the plan which you have so kindly proposed for my benefit. She has been to me as a sister throughout this trying period; and I would do nothing without her complete concurrence."

Mr. Macdonald applauded Henry's suggestion; and he took his leave. My cousin then sought me and recapitulated everything that had taken place.

I must here for a few minutes interrupt the thread of my narrative, to explain some of the reflections that I had made since my aunt's death. At first I was frightfully shocked at the bare idea of having embraced a profession of which I now saw that she could not have approved; and I even resolved to abandon it. But gradually my heart was full of affliction for the loss of that beloved relative, I could not help thinking that she had imbibed unfounded and unwarrantable prejudices against that profession. I did not consider myself imperiously called upon the surrender on that account a career which was already giving me fame and a competency; and which would in time yield me wealth; and I likewise

felt persuaded that if my aunt had lived I could have succeeded in convincing her that she entertained erroneous impressions with regard to the life I had embraced. Having passed all her years in provincial towns—having been herself very carefully brought up by her own parents—and entertaining strong notions in respect to religion and religious duties—it was not to be wondered at that she had conceived an antipathy to the stage,—though during all the time I had dwelt with her at Sheffield she had never once suffered it to transpire. This was doubtless the result of accident, inasmuch as the secluded existence we led when I was there had furnished no opportunity for the enunciation of any opinion on the point. Therefore, as I have just said, I conceived that it was a mere prejudice on the part of my deceased aunt, and which could easily have been overruled by the representations I might have made.

The result of all this reasoning on my part was a determination *not* to abandon a profession which for me had become a sure and certain source of subsistence, in order to plunge into the uncertainties of other avocations. But now arose the question—Should I reveal the whole truth to my cousin? On this point I knew not how to act. I disliked dissimulation; but it was equally repugnant to my feelings to make a confession that would shock his mind—perhaps add to the bitterness of the affliction he was already experiencing—and likewise render necessary an argument for which his present mood was by no means adapted. Hitherto I had breathed not a syllable on the subject; nor had the circumstances at the death-bed been made the topic of discourse between us. I was therefore undecided how to act at the time when Mr. Macdonald called and made the proposals which I have described. I should here, perhaps, add that although Henry and his deceased mother were acquainted with the fact I was living with a family named Norman it had evidently never struck them that Mr. and Mrs. Norman were the well-known actors: and as for Juliet, to whom they believed I was a sort of companion, she had been publicly known only as Mademoiselle Delessert. Besides, they seldom saw the London papers; and even when they did catch a glimpse of them, they had been by no means likely to study the theatrical intelligence.

I now return to the thread of my narrative. Henry sought me immediately after his interview with Mr. Macdonald; and he told me all that had taken place. I listened with the deepest attention; and in conclusion he said, "Now tell me, my dear Ellen, how shall I act?"

I deliberated without immediately responding to his query; and he proceeded to add with mingled kindness and diffidence, "But unless you yourself, Ellen, are happy in your home in the metropolis, I will not think of leaving this country. No, not for worlds! This home shall be yours—and it would be a pleasure for me to toil for us both!"

"Believe me, dear Henry—believe me," I said, with much emotion, "my account militate against your interests!"

"Then I will go, Ellen!" answered Henry, "because I have found a friend in Mr. Macdonald—and the advice of such a friend must be followed. And now forgive me, dear cousin, for what I am about to say——but that money which my poor mother has left—it is yours,

Ellen——I do not require it—it may be of service to you——"

"Nor do I need it," I answered. "No, my dear Henry—I have no use for such a sum. Yet your kindness will never be forgotten!"

"Kindness, Ellen?" he exclaimed. "Are you not to me as a sister?"

Scarcely had he given utterance to these words, when an idea seemed to flash across him; and he was full of confusion. Doubtless he recollected that we were but cousins, and that the feeling which he entertained towards me was different from that which a brother would cherish for a sister,—a feeling too of which he was now abruptly made aware for the first time. And I was also filled with confusion; and I felt the blushes glow upon my cheeks.

"There is something I would say to you, Ellen," resumed Henry, in a faltering voice, as he took my hand and pressed it; "but after what has so recently occurred in this house, it would be a desceration!"

The tears rolled down his cheeks; but through their dimness his handsome brown eyes looked tenderly upon me: and all his heart was revealed as completely as if in the eloquence of language. Again did the blushes glow upon my cheeks: I was full of agitation and confusion: and my hand trembled in his own as he retained it in his clasp. There was an instant when I was on the point of proclaiming everything—the profession I had embraced, the fame I had already won, the brilliant prospects which were before me; but then a sudden revulsion of feelings took place—and I could not give utterance to a syllable of such confession! I flung upon him a glance—a single glance—which doubtless was as eloquent as his own looks had been to me; and we understood each other—we comprehended that there was a mutual love—our hearts were completely revealed—yet not another syllable on the tender topic came from *his* lips, and no word descriptive of my sentiments had fallen from my own tongue!

When I retired to my chamber after this scene I again and again reasoned within myself whether I had acted well in veiling the truth of my profession from Henry Wakefield? But again I asked myself wherefore I would distress him with a revelation that would be premature? He was going forth into the world; the range of his experiences would become enlarged; as his grief mellowed down into Christian resignation he would gradually glide into the innocent recreations of youth; and thus he would be brought to view the world in a new light. We should correspond with each other; and I could gradually break to him that which I dreaded to impart on a sudden. And, Oh! when he should come to learn that the chaplet of fame encircled my brows, and that I had achieved for myself a glorious repute and an honourable renown amidst the great intellects of the age,—and when at the same time he should have the full conviction of my uncle mished purity and stainless character,—Oh! would he not banish all prejudice from his soul and feel exultant at the success of her to whom his heart's fond love was given? Yes; the secret must still be kept!—and all the more so because that love of his was now my choicest happiness: it should be to me as a guide and a guardian—the angel of hope, soaring in the atmosphere of my existence, and scattering flowers from his brow and diamonds from his wings upon the pathway of my life!

Henry communicated to Mr. Macdonald the decision at which he

had arrived; and he proposed in another week to set out upon his Atlantic voyage. During this week my cousin's affliction took the soft melancholy aspect of resignation; and it was evident that the love he experienced for me, and the consciousness of being loved in return, had infused the precious balm of solace loved in return, had infused the precious balm of solace into his soul. We walked out together daily; and though our conversation settled not even for an instant upon the *one* topic which moved our inward hearts,—yet did we both seem to have the intuitive, the simultaneous, and the transfusing consciousness that we were both thinking on the same subject. If we wandered into the fields, Nature itself seemed full of love—love that was wafted in the sweet melody of birds, infusing into the heart a mild subdued joy as sweetly pure as the harmony itself, and etherealising every thought and feeling,—love that was borne on the winged fragrance of every flower which gave its perfume to the breeze —love in that very breeze itself, as it kissed the leaves of shurbs and trees, —and love in the murmurings of the crystal streamlet as it reflected the beams of day and glided betwixt its flower-gemmed banks.

But at length the day—the hour—for separation came. We had agreed to quit that cottage at the same moment,—I to enter upon my journey to the metropolis—Henry to repair to his employer's establishment to receive the parting instructions before he set out on his Atlantic voyage. Yes—the moment of separation arrived; and as we looked at each other, we both comprehended that our hearts were making the strongest efforts to keep back an outburst of the feelings and avoid the aggravation of our mutual pangs. Then over the quivering lips of the noble-hearted Henry a soft smile broke, and in the deep earnest eyes—those handsome brown eyes which in my imagination had elsewhere often looked upon me—a high and holy lustre appeared to shine; and never upon female ear came a sweeter music of the masculine voice than when he said, in a tone that was nevertheless half-hushed and low, "Were it not, Ellen, for the *one* hope that cheers me, I could not endure this separation!"

The tears started from my eyes; and my hand, which he had taken in his, was as tremulous as the heart which was palpitating in my bosom. My cheeks were blushing: but I did not cast down my looks—for I had no false shame nor prudery in acknowledging by those looks that I loved him, and that his love was as much a sustaining hope to me as it was to himself.

"Were it not, Ellen, that we are about to part," he continued, "I would not so soon after my terrible bereavement address you in such a strain. But, Oh! I feel that my sainted mother is looking down and smiling upon us now! For of an evening, when my work of a day was over, and we sat together in this little parlour, she would often say what happiness it would be for her if she could have both of us with her, and that you, Ellen, should have no need to earn your own livelihood elsewhere. I did not *then* comprehend the full meaning of my mother's words; but *now* I understand it all. And thus, Ellen, in plighting our faith to each other we are fulfilling a wish that my deceased parent cherished; and there is no harm in the language in which I am addressing you."

"There is no harm, Henry," I murmuringly responded; "and rest assured that your image shall alone

occupy my heart—and when you return to England——"

"Oh, Ellen!" he exclaimed, "the separation though but for a few months, appears to be an age!"—and it was like a broken outcry that his voice thus sounded upon my ears, tremulous and wild, and full of the mournfullest music.

I endeavoured to give some consolatory response: but my own voice was lost in the sobs that were convulsing my bosom.

"May all possible happiness attend you, dearest Ellen, while I am away!" he continued, in a softer and more collected tone; "and when we meet again, it may perchance be with a prospect of soon united, no more to separate. And then—Oh! *then*. Ellen, I shall become the guardian of your happiness, and rest assured that it will be in good keeping! So far as that happiness depends upon me, believe me that the corroding lines of sorrow shall never mar the smoothness of that pure brow of thine; nor from those sweet eyes shall word or deed on my part ever call forth a tear. I feel, Ellen, as if my lips had so many things to express that a new language would be necessary to give them utterance. The words which I can command are poor and incomplete to form the blessings which my soul yearns to invoke upon your head!"

"And I, Henry, send up my prayers to heaven to invoke all its mercies on your behalf! Success will attend you in your career," I continued, in tremulous and broken accents; "for one so good and noble-minded as yourself cannot fail to prosper."

We were both weeping: I sank upon his breast—and he bestowed the parting kiss upon me. We separated;—and it seemed as if a veil—a veil of stupendous darkness—had suddenly fallen upon my eyes and shut out the sunlight from my vision.

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CHAPTER XVI.

EMBLEDON.

AMIDST the thoughts which occupied me during the first part of journey homeward were the recollections of the scenes which had taken place just before I left London. I allude to the marriage of Juliet with Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe, and all the misgivings that had filled my mind in respect to Mr. Croft. Mrs. Norman had informed me that he held the curacy of Embledon—a village in Warwickshire; and I was to pass through that country on my way back to London. I had in the first instance resolved, when questioning Mrs. Norman relative to Mr. Croft, to make some secret inquiries with regard to him; and my original idea was to take the earliest opportunity of procuring some clerical directory or guide and searching for his name. But now that I was about to enter the very country in which he was represented as residing, I deemed it more expedient to institute personal inquiries on the point. My time was my own—I had an ample supply of funds; and a waste of a few hours, or the expenditure of a few extra pounds, were matters of no consequence to me. Besides, being in mourning for my deceased aunt—I could not immediately resume my theatrical engagement; and thus I was in no immediate hurry to get back to the metropolis.

It was in the evening when I reached Birmingham; and having ascertained that Embledon was about twenty miles distant from that

great manufacturing town. I took up my quarters at a hotel for the night. On the following morning I entered a chaise and set out for Embledon; for I should observe that at the hotel I was unable to obtain any information relative to the name of the minister holding the curacy of the village to which I was now repairing. At the next town to that village I renewed my inquiry—but still without receiving an answer which might have the effect of preventing me from continuing my journey any further in that direction. Embledon, it appeared, was a small, isolated, out-of-the-way place; and all that was known at the town to which I have just alluded was that a new curate had been recently appointed at the village, but his name I could not learn.

I therefore continued my way to Embledon; and in due time I obtained from the brow of a hill a glimpse of the little village, which was situated in the depth of a valley. It was embowered in verdure: it did not seem to consist of more than some twenty houses; and above the wide-spreading yew-trees the spire of the little church peeped up. A rivulet meandered through the village, and was crossed by a small bridge at its entrance. Altogether the scene was picturesque, as I thus caught the first view of it from the chaise—window on the brow of the hill that the vehicle was beginning to descend.

The road wound down into the valley, where it crossed the rivulet by means of the bridge to which I have just alluded. As the chaise approached that bridge, I beheld an individual leaning listlessly against the brick-parapet. He was dressed in black—he was of tall stature; a thought flashed to my mind that he was the object of my visit; and as he now slowly turned to look at the approaching equipage. I unmistakably recognised the countenance of Mr. Croft.

I saw at the same time too that he recognised me; and I was suddenly filled with confusion. What explanation could I possibly give for my visit to Embledon? On this point I had not reflected before; nor had I many moments for reflection now, inasmuch as immediately on recognising my face, Mr. Croft made a sign for the postilion to stop: and he came up to the chaise window.

"Miss Percy," he said, in a voice which struck me to be of constrained softness, while the affability of his manner likewise appeared to be forced,—"I presume you have come to see me: for no other object could possibly bring you to this out-of-the way place?"

Thus speaking, he at once opened the door of the chaise, let down the steps, and proffered his hand to assist me to alight.

"You can go on to the public-house," he said to the postilion,—thus taking upon himself a sort of authority in the proceedings. "This young lady has come to see me on particular business; I will show her the way to the tavern when she chooses to take her departure again."

All this was done so suddenly, and yet in such a collected, business-like, off hand manner, that I was taken as it were by surprise; and I yielded mechanically to Mr. Croft's guidance. I therefore descended from the vehicle, which immediately drove away; and I remained alone with him upon that bridge. He was dressed in black, as I have already said: and he wore a white cravat,—thus far having the appearance of a clergyman: but there was something slovenly in his

toilet, and his linen was not remarkably clean. Still I had no doubt that he was really what he represented himself to be: and now that I began somewhat to recover from the confusion and bewilderment in which the encounter had at first thrown me, my next feeling was one of joy on Juliet's account.

"And now, tell me, Miss Percy," said Mr. Croft, "what has brought you here? I hope no misfortune nor accident has occurred to either of those whom I met the other day when you were present. But this mourning that you wear—"

"It is not for either of them," I answered: "it is for a relative of my own:"—and the tears trickled down my cheeks as the memory of my deceased aunt was thus vividly conjectured up.

"And might I injure who this relative was?" asked Mr. Croft, as he gazed intently upon me—yet not in a disrespectful manner; but it was rather with a mournful earnestness.

"My aunt—Mrs. Wakefield," I responded. "She recently died at Paisley—whence I have just come."

Methought that Mr. Croft murmured something—but I could not catch what it was; and as I contemplated his countenance, the conviction was once more strong in my mind that he was in reality the stranger whom I had twice seen at my grandfather's house at Leeds, and of whose visit to the late Mrs. Parks in London I had subsequently become aware.

"And now tell me, Miss Percy," he continued, "what has brought you to Embledon?"

"Will you first of all tell *me*, Mr. Croft," I inquired, looking him very hard in the face, "whether you ever saw me before you met me the other day at Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe's cottage in the neighbourhood of Blackheath.

"Yes, Miss Percy," he at once answered: "I was in London some few weeks previous to that occasion; and I beheld you make your *debut* in the character of Portia. I know you therefore to be that same Miss Trafford who is already so favourably known to the world."

This reply was given with an ingenuousness which seemed so offhand and so natural, that a sudden change took place within me; and I felt convinced that I must be mistaken in supposing that Mr. Croft was identical with the stranger whose presence had so excited my deceased grandfather at Leeds, and concerning whom Mrs. Parks had spoken to me in such disparaging terms.

"But why did you ask me that question?" continued Mr. Croft. "Surely, he added with a smile, "you have not come all the way to Embledon to put such a query?"

"I feel the necessity of dealing frankly with you," I now said, collecting all my thoughts for an explanation which to a certain extent I saw myself bound to give. "On the occasion when we met the other day at the bridal ceremony, it at once struck me that I had seen you before. In my earlier years I lived at Leeds with my grandfather, Mr. Forsyth; and it was at his house that I fancied I had thus seen you."

"I never was at Leeds in my life," answered Mr. Croft, with a countenance so unchanging, an air so composed, and a manner so completely unruffled, that I could not possibly disbelieved him.

"It is therefore evidently a mistake on my part," I said; "and I hope you will pardon—"

"There is nothing to pardon, Miss Percy," rejoined Mr. Croft. "But

on the other hand, you may naturally suppose that my curiosity is now somewhat excited——"

"Then once more must I deal candidly with you, sir," I exclaimed, determined to tell the truth: for indeed I saw no way of evading it. "I beheld at Leeds that person to whom I have alluded, and whom I mistook for you, under circumstances which led me to contemplate with astonishment and distrust the idea that he could now possibly be exercising the duties of a minister of religion."

"And therefore, Miss Percy," added Mr. Croft, "you have come to Embledon to satisfy yourself on the point. And you now find me here; and that is the church where my duties are performed; and that little cottage of which you catch a glimpse amongst yonder trees, is my humble habitation. If I have not asked you to enter it, it was through no want of courtesy, but simply from a feeling of delicacy inasmuch as there is no lady within those walls to receive you."

All this was said in a tone which conveyed a sense of so much propriety as well as truthfulness, that Mr. Croft rose higher than before in my estimation, and I felt that I had outraged him by a suspicious identification with the individual whom Mrs. Parks had represented at the time as an evil-intentioned man.

"Your own good sense," continued Mr. Croft, will tell you that the mistrust you have entertained with regard to myself, might act materially to my prejudice if you have elsewhere mentioned the suspicions that have so evidently brought you to Embledon. Observe! I am not blaming you—I can understand full well that a feeling of friendship on behalf of the Normans has induced you to take this step——"

"Oh! believe me, sir," I exclaimed, "I have been guarded on the point! I am incapable of wilfully inflicting an injury; and though I have acted upon a suspicion, yet I have not imparted it."

"I thank you for this assurance, Miss Percy," replied Mr. Croft; "it is only what I should have expected from one of your evidently generous disposition.—Ah! and now I recollect, I left you in a swoon at Lord Frederick's cottage. I was compelled to depart hurriedly—immediately after the ceremony; and on the present occasion my *first* question, instead of the *last*, ought to have been in reference to the state into which your overwrought feelings had plunged you the other evening?"

I did not choose to inform Mr. Croft that the very suspicion which now brought me to Embledon, was the one that had deprived me of consciousness on the occasion of the bridal: and I therefore briefly assured him that the indisposition to which he had alluded was only transient.

"And now, Miss Percy," he said, "I will conduct you to the place where the post-chaise has put up. But it is only a poor public-house, affording no accommodation for a young lady, and therefore my regret is all the greater that I cannot invite you to partake of such hospitality as my own humble habitation might afford."

I thanked Mr. Croft for his kindness—but assured him that I neither needed rest nor refreshment, and that I should at once set off on my return to Birmingham. He accompanied me to the public-house, which was indeed as miserable a place as he had described it, and which was situated at the very entrance of the village, about a quarter of a mile from the bridge. The only persons I saw were a couple of dirty children at the door

of a cottage opposite—an old bleareyed woman throwing sand upon the floor of the diminutive parlour in the public-house itself—and a still older man (her husband) talking to the postilion, who was partaking of some refreshment on a bench in front of the miserable place. The old woman however curtsied respectfully to Mr. Croft—the old man rose and touched his hat; and then the ancient couple indulged in a good long stare at me. Mr. Corft took it upon himself to order the postilion to harness the horses with the least possible delay; and he then conducted me into the little parlour which the crone of a landlady had been sweeping out. He conversed on general topics; and all the while his voice flowed with such softness that I never once caught a single intonation to remind me of that rougher and harsher voice which had belonged to the stranger for whom I had taken this reverend gentleman.

In ten minutes the post-chaise was in readiness; Mr. Croft handed me into it, and made a courteous bow as it drove away. Perfectly satisfied with the result of my visit to Embledon, and glad that I had paid it, I returned to Birmingham. Thence I proceeded to London; and arriving in Hunter Street, was most kindly welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Norman: I had written to them form Paisley to inform them of my aunt's death: they were not therefore surprised to behold me return in morning; and they proffered their condolences for the loss which I had sustained. I did not acquaint them with my deviation from the direct route in order to visit Embledon: there was no need to mention the suspicions which had taken me thither. I found them in better spirits relative to Juliet than when I had left London, for they had received letters from her, and these announced that her happiness was complete.

It had been given out at the theatre, in the first instance, that my sudden absence was caused by the serious illness of a relation; and subsequently it was stated that the death of this relative would prevent my immediate return to the boards. I learnt from the Normans that Lady Lilla Essendine had called twice to ascertain if intelligence had been received concerning me; and two or three days after my return her ladyship's carriage drove up to the door. Lilla, on being shown to the drawing-room where I received her, embraced me with every testimony of affection, and condoled with me on my loss. She then proposed that as I could not immediately return to the stage, I should go and pass a few days with her. The invitation was not altogether unacceptable: the Normans, as I have already said, received a great deal of company and had many visitors; I was as yet in no frame of mind to mingle with society; and at the same time I did not wish to be a check upon the usual pursuits of my friends. I therefore agreed to Lady Lilla's proposal; but I would not accompany her in her carriage on that occasion: I promised to be with her on the following day or at latest the day after.

My only reason for this delay was the necessity of paying a visit to my milliner, and likewise of making other purchases which the fact of my being in mourning necessitated. These little matters were however settled more speedily than I had expected; and immediately after breakfast on the following day I set out in the Norman's carriage for Claremont Villa. It was about eleven o'clock when I reached my destination; and I learnt that her

ladyship, not expecting me thus early, had gone out for a ramble. I was shown to the chamber which I had occupied on the occasion of my previous visit; and having put off my bonnet and shawl, I descended to the parlour. Her ladyship had not as yet returned from her walk; and I went forth into the garden to meet her when she should re-enter. In case the reader should be at all surprised at the circumstance of my revisiting Claremont Villa after the incidents which had taken place there on the previous occasion, let it be remembered that all the disagreeable suspicions which in the first instance were engendered by the supposed identity of the handwriting, and by the incidents connected with the gipsies, had been ultimately set at rest by a larger experience of Lady Lilla's kindness and by a closer study of her character.

I walked forth, I say, into the garden; and not perceiving Lady Lilla, I bent my steps in the direction of the shrubbery—thinking that she might return by way of the back gate leading into the lane; for the servant had told me that her mistress had gone out in her summer hat and in a morning *deshabille*. I therefore knew that she could not have proceeded far; and I concluded also that her steps would be directed along the seclusion of the shady lane. Scarcely, however, had I entered the shrubbery, when my ear caught the sound of voices at a little distance; and the next moment a break amongst the trees revealed to me the two persons who were thus discoursing together. Let the reader conceive my astonishment when I beheld Edwin St. Clair walking with Lady Lilla Essendine!

I myself was unperceived; and I remained riveted to the spot whence I thus caught sight of them. Her ladyship wore a large straw hat, as I had been informed; and her elegant morning dress set off the exquisite symmetry of her shape, although it fitted loosely to her form. Her countenance was towards me: I perceived that it was flushed; and that her cheeks, usually of alabaster paleness, had the vivid glow of excitement upon them. Methought too that her large and beautiful blue eyes were flashing fire from beneath the rich brown lashes; and the pearly teeth were gleaming between the lips that were wreathing with scorn or indignation, or some other feeling powerfully stirred. I could not immediately catch a glimpse of St. Clair's countenance; but I heard him say in a cold voice, which also had a tincture of contemptuous indifference in its accents, "Let it be war, then, Lilla, if you will:—and perhaps it was absurd of me to think of offering you peace."

They passed on; and the nearest group of trees concealed them from my view. I was about to retreat towards the villa, when they immediately reappeared: and as they had turned to pursue the contrary direction, it was now Edwin St. Clair's countenance that was towards me, while that of Lilla was averted. He was speaking in a low tone, but vehemently. There was an animation likewise upon *his* countenance; and then all in a moment it gave place to that expression of sardonic wickedness which I had on former occasions seen sweep over it. He gesticulated—he appeared to be threatening. Lady Lilla stopped short; she drew her tall form up to its full height; and at that moment nothing could exceed the imposing majesty of her appearance. The carriage of the well-shaped head on its straight

alabaster column, the upheaving of the superb bust, and the entire attitude of that shape with its sweeping length of limbs, had something statuesque which reminded one of the effigy of an ancient goddess.

"You speak to me of peace or war," I heard her say in the silver clearness of her half-scornful, half-indignant voice; "and you think, perhaps, that I am to express gratitude for the patronising language in which you have addressed me? No, Edwin St. Clair! The day has gone by ——"

Here they reached a distance which prevented me from catching the remainder of the sentence; they were pacing to and fro in that little open space in the midst of the shrubbery and as they again returned, another fragment of Lady Lilla speech was wafted to my ear.

"Peace or war?" she was exclaiming, in evident reiteration of those words which from his lips had rendered her so scornful and so indignant: "It were well, indeed, to propose to me peace if I were a coward, and if I trembled at any consequences! As for war, if you know aught of the character of woman—if that bright intelligence of yours of which, with all your affected disdain for the opinion of the world, you are so proud—if, I say, by means of that bright intelligence you have been enabled to fathom the mysterious depths of the human heart—surely, Edwin St. Clair, you must have known that such an one as Lilla Essendine—".

Here again the speech was broken off so far as my power of hearing was concerned; and when the two retraced their way, it was Captain St. Clair who was addressing her ladyship.

"Nay, be it as you say, Lilla," were the words which my ear now caught. "Pursue this path which you have sketched out for yourself! Frustrate me in all my designs—"

"In your iniquities, Edwin!" ejaculated her ladyship vehemently; and stopping short, she looked him full in the face.

A scornful laugh rang forth from St. Clair's lips; it was a laugh which resembled what imagination might suppose to be the sardonic malice mirth of a fiend; and though in itself vibrating with the natural harmony of Edwin's voice, it made me shudder and quiver all over. It was a laugh which shocked and terrified my soul! All the human capabilities of mischief—all the evil feelings and passions which could possibly concrete in the heart of man—appeared to find expression in that dread laugh. It was a horrible music, so to speak—horrible as that which in Pandemonium itself might ring forth a paean in praise of the Prince of the fallen angels!

Shocked, dismayed, and horrified, I retreated from my hiding place and re-entered the villa. At once ascending to my own chamber, I sat down and gave way to my reflections. Bitterly did I regret my revisit to a dwelling where it seemed as if I was ever to be perplexed and tortured by mysteries that inspired me with a poignant curiosity as well as with the most painful sensations. Again did the suspicion—strong and almost irresistible—come back to my mind that Lilla herself must really have been the authoress of that fragment of a letter which I had seen at St. Clair's house; for that there *was* some stupendous and portentous secret subsisting between those two, I could scarcely have any doubt. And yet, on the other hand, the scorn and indignation with which she had treated him—the power which she seemed conscious of wielding over him—the

authority and the virtuous hauteur with which she had corrected him in his speech, when she seemed to declare that it was only his *iniquities* which she sought to frustrate,—there were these circumstances, I say, which compelled me to hesitate ere I came to the conclusion that Lilla herself was a guilty being, the victim of St. Clair, and *only* for this reason his enemy.

I was in the midst of my reflections, when I heard light footsteps on the gravel-walk just underneath the window, which was open; and glancing forth, I beheld Lady Lilla Essendine. She caught a glimpse of my countenance; and her own becoming animated with joy (I had not been able to observe what its immediately previous expression was) she exclaimed, "Ah, Ellen I am so rejoiced that you have come!"

I hastened down-stairs,—making up my mind to veil as much as possible whatsoever unpleasant thoughts or feelings were agitating within me; and the next moment I was strained in her arms. There was something so warm in her embrace—something so cordial in the tone with which she greeted me—something so ingenuous, sincere, and frank-hearted in the joy which my presence appeared to occasion her, that I was again prepossessed in her favour; and when once more alone with my own reflections, they assumed a different aspect from that which they had so recently worn.

"How can I believe this amiable and beautiful creature to be stained with crime? It were a terrible libel upon the whole sex to conceive that such fearful guile could be harboured in so angelic a form! She could not have been the authoress of that fragment of a letter. But I understand it all! Inasmuch as St. Clair is the nephew of her deceased husband, she respects the memory of that husband too much to make an open exposure of her knowledge of the misdeeds, whatsoever they may be, that have been perpetrated by his surviving relative. Yet, on the other hand, she is resolved to frustrate, to the best of her power, any fresh iniquities on his part. And it was for this reason that she warned me against him! Believing at the time my affections to be wavering under the influence of his insidious power, she put me on my guard against his unprincipled character! Nay, more!—well aware that he was capable of any atrocity, she furnished me with the means of reducing him to abject submission! But ah! those means!"

And then I thought of the mystery of the flower; and it vividly brought back to my recollection the incident of the gipsies; so that my thoughts were again becoming bewildered and painful to a degree that was almost intolerable; and, in order to escape from them, I hastened to rejoin Lady Lilla Essendine and the visitors who were at the moment in the drawing room.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PHIAL IN THE FILIGREE CASE.

THERE was company at dinner that evening. Some of the guests were of very lively and cheerful dispositions: but out of respect for my mourning garb, there was neither music or singing. The evening, however, passed away pleasantly enough; and my mind felt relieved of the weight which had been left upon it by the incidents of the morning.

"My dear Ellen," said Lady Lilla, in the most affectionate

manner, as we were about to separate for the night, the guests having taken their departure, "I am sorry that these friends of mine should have come this evening: for I meant you to experience at the villa that quietitude and tranquility which the house of your friends the Normans could not afford. But they dropped in quite casually, as you perceived —uninvited—availing themselves of the license of intimacy——"

"Pray offer no apology, my dear Lilla," I answered; for her ladyship had insisted that we should call each other by our Christian names, "I do not consider that there is any harm in a little innocent recreation; and I confess that the society I have met this evening has improved my spirits."

"I am rejoiced to hear it," answered her ladyship: and having embraced me, she wished me a good night's rest.

I ascended to my chamber, and began to disapparel myself. Lady Lilla had offered to place a maid entirely at my disposal: but I was enabled to dispense with any such service at my night toilet. I was therefore alone in my room; and I undressed, slowly—for the thoughts of the morning came gradually stealing back into my mind. At length I lay down to rest, and sleep visited my eyes.

How long I had slumbered, I knew not; but as I gradually awoke, methought that sounds of moaning or lamentation were being wafted to my ears through the otherwise deep silence of the night.

This idea was at first vague and dreamy, and seemed like the end of a vision that was slipping out of my mind: but as I became more completely awake, the impression grew stronger. I listened with suspended breath: there could now be no farther uncertainty as to the reality of those sounds. They were assuredly the moanings and lamentations of one who seemed to be in deep mental distress! and yet they were so faintly audible that they would have been lost amidst the various sounds which prevail in the day-time. It was only now, in the profound stillness of the night, that they were thus perceptible to the ear.

I rose up to a sitting posture, and listened in a sort of affright. The sounds ceased: I was recovering my presence of mind—and was just saying to myself that they must be the result of a dream which, though forgotten, had left a certain impression on my mind—when they recommenced. What could be their cause? from what quarter could they come?"

Lady Lilla's chamber was situated on the opposite side of the landing, and therefore exactly facing mine. The chamber which intervened, in the front part of the house, was a spare bedroom, and untenanted. There was a back chamber on the same floor; and this was occupied by Lilla's lady's-maid. The other servants slept upon the storey above. It certainly might have been one of these domestics up-stairs who was moaning and lamenting either in illness or in a troubled dream; but still I was inclined to fancy that it must be either Lady Lilla herself or else her maid. At all events, I was determined to ascertain; for these sounds continued. Rising from my bed, I gently opened the door and listened. The sounds were now somewhat more audible; but still I could not distinguish their source. I stole forth upon the landing, into which the moon-beams dimly penetrated from the staircase window; and I listened at the door of the maid-servant's chamber. I felt tolerably well

assured that the sound came not from within that room; and I passed on with my naked, noiseless feet to the door of Lady Lilla's chamber.

Now the sounds were more audible; and they denoted so much mental distress that I unhesitating open the door. The wax-lights were burning upon the toilet table; the bed was unoccupied; the bed-clothes were not disturbed; it was evident that as yet her ladyship had not sought her couch. Nor was she in the room. All this I beheld at a glance.

The next moment, however, a side-door opened, and Lady Lilla suddenly made her appearance,—thus emalating from a place which I believed to be her dressing room, though I had never been in it.

I scarcely remembered afterwards what was the expression of countenance which she wore on thus abruptly coming into my presence; but I fancied that it was a look of either anger or affright, as if annoyed or terrified at hearing her chamber-door open. But hastily closing the door by which she had just emerged, she exclaimed, "Good heavens, Ellen! what is the matter? Has anything disturbed you? Have I—"

"Pardon this intrusion," I quickly responded; "but I feared that you were ill. I heard sounds of distress—"

"Yes—I have been indisposed—indeed, for a short time I felt very very ill, and had a great mind to call up the servants. But I am now better; and I am truly sorry, my dear Ellen," added Lilla affectionately, "that I should have disturbed you. I was in hopes that though I myself was suffering, you were enjoying the sweets of slumber."

"Oh, why did you not summon me, Lilla?" I reproachfully exclaimed. "It is long past midnight," I continued, glancing at the timepiece which was upon the mantel of the elegantly-furnished room; "and you have not yet been in bed!"—for her ladyship was completely dressed, just as she was when I had parted from her at about half-past ten o'clock.

"I must have eaten something that disagreed with me," she said: "but I assure you that the indisposition is now past. I feel much better."

"But you look very pale Lilla ——"

"Nevertheless, Ellen, I assure you that I am now quite well! Return to your chamber, my dear friend: I can safely promise not to disturb you again."

I accordingly withdrew: and returning to my bedroom, fell asleep again. Immediately upon awaking in the morning, I proceeded to Lilla's chamber door, at which I tapped gently. No answer was given. I was about to retire, when methought it was my duty to assure myself that she was better: for after the occurrence of the past night, I conceived her to be one of those strong-minded women who would suffer almost any extent of pain rather than disturb a household at unreasonable hours. I therefore slowly opened the door, and glided softly into the room. Lilla was sleeping; and her slumber appeared serene as that of an infant. Her head was pillowed upon one of her snow arms; her vermilion lips were slightly apart, revealing the pearls within; and there was a slight—very slight flush upon her usually pale cheeks. The luxuriant masses of her pale amber hair floated over the arm and the pillow which sustained her head: the rich brown lashes forming the thick fringes of the now-closed

eyelids, rested upon her cheeks. Nothing could exceed the dazzling brilliancy of her complexion, nor the sculptural beauty of that bust, which was now completely revealed Methought, as she lay sleeping there, I had never looked upon a more angelic creature; and there was something so sweetly serene, so innocently tranquil in this profound sleep of hers, that it was impossible to believe the snowy bosom that was gently heaving, contained a heart conscious of a misdeed the revelation of which would heighten into the crimson blush of shame that delicate carnation tint which rested upon the cheeks.

I stood gazing upon her, as on a lovely statue or picture, for several minutes; and then I was on the point of retiring as softly as I entered, when the elegant ormolu clock upon the mantelpiece began chiming the hour of eight with its silver bell. It was one of those ingeniously-contrived pieces of French or Genevese mechanism, which at the period of striking set in motion several pretty little figures of men and women in a hollow place under the dial,—and which place in the present instance represented a rural scene where several peasants were dancing. I had seen this clock two or three times before when happening to be in Lady Lilla's room; and I now advanced to the mantelpiece to contemplate the evolutions of the little automatons of scarcely an inch high, and which were exquisitely fashioned and coloured so as to represent male and female peasants of a Swiss valley. It was a childish curiosity on my part that made me thus pause on the present occasion; but I have ever loved ingenious pieces of mechanism of the description to which I am alluding.

The dancing of the automaton peasants was wont to continue for some few minutes after the clock had finished striking; and I stood regarding them. While thus occupied, my eyes settled upon a curious little bottle which stood close by the clock, and which I did not remember to have ever noticed before. It was of the purest crystal, exquisitely cut, and enclosed in a little web-like framework or filigree, of silver beautifully chased; and there was a cover of the same metal over the glass stopper. The phial, which was barely three inches in height, was half full of a fluid, clear and colourless, and looking indeed like the purest water, although I had no doubt that it was in reality some choice perfume. In a word, the ornament was altogether so beautiful that I could not help taking it up to inspect it closely—until suddenly recollecting that I was intruding in a way that might now savour indiscretion, I replaced the ornament upon the mantel, and glanced towards the bed to see if Lilla was still sleeping. Yes—she slumbered on as sweetly and serenly as before: the chiming of the timepiece had not disturbed her. I glided forth noiselessly from the room—closed the door with all possible gentleness—and returned to my own chamber well pleased at having satisfied myself that Lady Lilla had evidently recovered from the indisposition experienced during the night.

When we met at the breakfast-table, I did not tell her that I had penetrated into her room that morning: I deemed it unnecessary. She now seemed as well as ever: but she failed not to thank me for my kind attentions during the night; and I explained how the sounds of moaning and distress had called me from my couch and my chamber.

After breakfast we walked to-

gether in the garden for an hour or two: we then entered the parlour to read or work until luncheon time. After this slight refreshment, we ascended to our respective chambers to dress for an airing in the carriage. My toilet, being simple—as I was in mourning—was soon performed; and I was about to issue from the room, when I heard hasty footsteps approaching the door, at which someone knocked in a quick and excited manner. I immediately answered the summons; and Lilla's lady's-maid, who looked very pale and agitated, exclaimed, "For heaven's sake come quick, Miss Percy! My lady is in a dead swoon!"

I sped to Lilla's chamber, and found her lying upon the bed, stretched out like a corpse, and as white as one. It subsequently appeared that while she was in the midst of her toilet, she had suddenly seized with this fit; and on being placed by her maid on the bed, she had become thus fearfully rigid.

"Get restorative!—volatile salts—hartshorn—vinegar—anything!" I exclaimed to the maid, who seemed to be utterly lost in bewilderment.

"And let one of the servants run for the surgeon!"

The maid hastened off to obey my orders. I steeped a towel in water, and laid it across Lilla's forehead,—having previously propped her up with pillows. Then I chafed her hands, which were cold as marble; and the maid reappeared, accompanied by another female domestic, bringing the restoratives that I had asked for. In a few minutes Lady Lilla began to show signs of life; and she gasped painfully as the lungs resumed their play.

"We require a more powerful restorative!" I exclaimed. "This vinegar is poor!—these salts have lost their pungency! Surely there must be something here?"

I sped to the toilet-table; but found nothing that I thought of any use.

"In the dressing-room perhaps?" I cried, now hastening to that door whence I had seen Lady Lilla emerge during the previous night.

"Dressing-room, miss?" said the maid. "That is not a dressing-room."

"Then what is it?" I asked, in astonishment; and my fingers grasped the handle.

"I don't know, miss," replied the maid. "I have never been in it."

The handle had already turned in my grasp: but the door itself was locked—and the key was not in it. For a moment I was smitten with profound surprise at the singularity of the young woman's observation: but Lilla's condition was such as speedily to absorb all other considerations. She was recovering, it is true: but I saw the necessity of applying strong restoratives in order to prevent a relapse before the surgeon should arrive.

I should here observe that a beautiful little spaniel of the King Charles breed, and which was a great pet with her ladyship, had found its way into the room; and with that peculiar instinct with which dogs are inspired, it was moaning near the foot of the bed, as if it were conscious of an approaching death. The circumstance alarmed me; and I saw the two maids exchange ominous looks as if they thought that it was all over with their mistress.

"Oh, for some powerful restorative!" I exclaimed; "some strong perfume—some essence——"

"There's lavender-water and there's eau-de-Cologne on the toilet-table," said the lady's-maid.

"Something stronger!" I ejacula

ted; and my eyes swept around the chamber. "Ah! I wonder what this is?"—and I snatched up the bottle in the filigree case from the mantel.

"I do not know what it is, miss," responded the maid. "I do not remember ever to have seen it there before to-day."

"It is some strong perfume, I have no doubt," I said. "It is hermetically fastened: it cannot possible have lost its power!"

While thus speaking, I was unscrewing the silver top; but this was by no means an easy task—for it fitted very tighs, and did not appear to have been recently removed. But in less than a minute it was off; and then I endeavoured to take out the glass stopper. This proceeding was equally difficult; and for more than another minute I despaired of effecting my purpose. Fortunately however Lady Lilla was now rapidly recovering. She opened her eyes, and gazed vacantly around her. At that instant I succeeded in extracting the glass stopper; and I was on the very point of applying bottle to Lady Lilla's nostrils, when she seemed to give a sudden and violent convulsive start, so that by the quick movement of her arm she dashed the phial from my hand.

The glass was shattered to pieces; and Lady Lilla Essendine fell back into a deep swoon again.

"The excitement of recovery was too much for her, miss!" said the lady's-maid; "how convulsively she tosses her arms about!"

I now hastened to apply the lavender-water and the eau-de-Cologne which I had previously rejected; and in a few minutes Lilla again displayed signs of life. Her recovery was slow, but gradually sure; and, on regaining her consciousness, she endeavoured to say something to me—for her lips moved, and she was visibly struggling for the power of utterance. I implored her to be tranquil: methought there was a strange wildness now succeeding the vacancy of her look on first opening her eyes this second time—but if so, it quickly passed away.

"A thousand thanks, dear Ellen," she at length feebly murmured, "for your kindness! But did I dream? or was there something broken?"

"I deeply regret, I answered, "that the pretty little glass ornament should have been destroyed. I thought it contained some strong perfume—But the silver case is safe!"

"Yes, yes—it did contain perfume!" interjected Lilla. "Never mind the accident, Ellen. I feel much better now;"—and she made an effort to rise from her couch.

"Remain here a little longer," I said; then turning to the domestic who had accompanied the lady's-maid to the room, I bade her sweep up the broken glass; for I had just accidentally trodden upon it while picking up the filigree case: and I was fearful lest it might cut Lilla's flesh when she should descend from the bed, as she had no shoes on—only the white silk stockings upon her exquisitely shaped feet.

The command was immediately obeyed; and the glass was swept carefully up. Lilla now bade the two maids retire, as she wished to remain alone with me. In a few minutes she rose and sat upon the sofa. I gently inquired if she were subject to such fits: but she assured me that she had never experienced one before; and then I recollected that the maid had appeared too much bewildered to be accustomed to scenes of this kind. I again apologized for the accident in respect to the bottle: but I pointed to the filigree case which I myself had placed upon the mantel, and assured

her that it was uninjured. She begged me not to think any more of the occurrence, for that it was a trifle not worth an apology. In a few minutes the lady's-maid ascended to say that the surgeon had arrived; but Lady Lilla declined to see him, declaring that she was now well enough to dispense with this services. She though that an airing would do her good; and we accordingly descended to the carriage, which was in waiting.

Her ladyship was accustomed to take the pet dog with her when riding out into the country: but on reaching the hall, we observed that the animal was not following as usual. I now remembered that it was in the bed-chamber during her ladyship's swoon; and I fancied that it must have been shut in there. I accordingly volunteered to run up and fetch the little spaniel while Lilla entered the carriage. On ascending to her chamber, I called the dog; but it did not make its appearance. I was about to leave the room, when my eye caught sight of something which was half concealed by the drapery which hung around the lower part of the bed. I thrust it aside—and beheld the poor dog lying dead.

I snatched it up to satisfy myself that life was indeed extinct: and on finding that it was so I was greatly distressed; for I knew that a favourite the little animal was with Lady Lilla Essendine. Taking it with me, I descended the stairs, and showed the dead animal to her ladyship. Although I had expected that she would be much afflicted, yet I certainly was not prepared so great an effect as that which the incident produced upon her. Her naturally-pale countenance become so deadly white that methought she was about to swoon again; and for several moments she gasped as if battling convulsively against the sensation of returning faintness. I quickly gave her a bottle of volatile salts, which I had brought with me as a precaution: and it suddenly seemed to revive her. She, however, insisted on seeing the poor dog buried under a rose-tree in the garden before we set out for our drive; and this was speedily accomplished by the footman.

For the remainder of that day, Lady Lilla continued dull and languid; and when night came I begged that she would permit me to sleep with her, or that she would allow her maid to occupy the sofa in the room. But she would not accede to either of these requests, and all I could elicit from her was a promise that she would not hesitate to call me if she felt the least indisposed during the night.

When alone in my own chamber, I remember for the first time since the occurrence of the incidents that strange answer which the lady's-maid had given me in respect to the place adjoining her mistress's chamber, and which I had until then fancied to be a dressing-room. As I have already said, I had on a few previous occasions been in Lady Lilla's chamber, but never in that little inner room: nor did I recollect that I had ever once seen the door open except during the preceding night when Lilla emerged thence. But then I had not so much as caught a glimpse of the interior of that room, for she had immediately closed the door behind her. Without being at all prone to attach undue importance to even that might be trivial, nor to envelope them in a mystery suitable only for the pages of a romance,—I nevertheless could not help thinking that there was something strange in the fact that Lilla's own maid should not have access to a place that

would at least want occasional sweeping and cleansing even though it was without an article of furniture. I have spoken of it as a little room, because by the configuration of the house, and the position of adjacent chambers (Lilla's and the spare bedroom) I could form a tolerably accurate idea of its dimensions. It was on the side of the house, and had a window at which I remembered to have observed from the outside that there were red curtains with broad yellow binding. With such handsome draperies it was scarcely to be supposed that the little room was otherwise unfurnished; and therefore if it were furnished did it not require the occasional care of a domestic?

These questions I asked myself; and trival though they may seem, they nevertheless bewildered me. I liked Lady Lilla—I may say that I loved her; for she was a sister in her kindness towards me. How I hated, therefore, all these mysteries, great or insignificant, which at every point appeared to invest the circumstances attending her! But still I thought to myself I was foolish to attach such importance to this new mystery of the room which always remained locked: for who could tell but that the solution thereof, if known to me, would be as simple as that of the riddle which puzzules one for a moment, but which when solved, makes one almost angry with one's self for not having guessed it? Perhaps that room was a sort of sanctum where Lilla kept valuable jewels of family relics, which she did not choose to be interfered with or inspected by her servants? Still my curiosity was piqued; and while again wishing that no mystery of any kind attached itself to a being in whom I felt so deep an interest, I sank into slumber.

A week passed without any incident worthy of the slightest note; and during this interval Lady Lilla Essendine recovered her wonted health and spirits. But before I continue the thread of my narrative, I should remark that we had discoursed together on the death of the favourite little dog; and Lilla expressed her belief that the instinct of the faithful animal had made it aware that she was in a very dangerous state at the time, and that it had died of sheer grief. She opened a volume of natural history to illustrate her argument by several extraordinary instances of canine fidelity; and I therefore arrived at the same conclusion as that which she had already formed.

I have said that a week passed since her ladyship's illness; and during this period I called upon the Normans, who had received fresh letters from Juliet. There was likewise one for me: and the tenor of all of them argued most favorably for a belief in her perfect happiness. I called likewise upon Melissa Harrison, whose health was by this time somewhat improved,—though she despaired of complete recovery; and she was forbidden the hope of returning to the stage. I compelled her to accept pecuniary succour from me; and nothing could exceed the gratitude of the unfortunate young woman.

The incident which I am about to relate, occurred during the night of the day following my visit to Miss Harrison. Lilla and I had dined alone together; and a little before eleven o'clock we retired to our respective chambers. I soon fell asleep; and my slumber, as it subsequently transpired, had lasted about two hours when I was startled up by that alarm which next to the cry of "Murder!" is the most

terrible of all cries: namely, that of "Fire!" For a moment I thought it must be merely a wild dream; but the next instant that hope was banished: for there was the quick rush of footsteps overhead—and the voice of the lady's-maid was shrieking forth the dire alarm upon the landing. I rushed from my chamber; and at the same moment Lady Lilla Essendine made her appearance on the other side. The terrible truth was quickly ascertained: the draperies of the lady's-maid's bed were in a blaze; the foolish young woman had been reading by candle-light—and had fallen asleep, only to awake to find her room in a conflagration!

The men-servants, having huddled on a few clothes, rushed to the burning chamber in the hope of extinguishing the fire: but they quickly announced that the attempt would be vain—for that the flames had caught the ceiling. It therefore become necessary for everyone to think of safety: and never perhaps in all my life were my own garments more expeditiously put on. The same was the case with Lady Lilla Essendine, as well as with the other inmates of the house: and then began a scene of indescribable bustle, not unmingled with confusion. I rushed down into the garden with my writing-desk containing my jewels: Lady Lilla had also possessed herself of her own valuables of the same description. One of the men-servants had rushed off to fetch the nearest fire-engine: the other was busily employed in getting the horses and carriages out of the stables. The female servants were bringing forth all portable articles of furniture, ornaments, nick-nacks, and plate, from the ground-floor ornaments. Two or three policemen were speedily upon the spot; and they rendered most efficient assistance in carrying out the furniture upon the lawn.

The upper part of the house was speedily in a blaze; and it was a considerable time before the fire-engines arrived. Many gentlemen from the villas in the neighbourhood came to the spot: and we received the kindest offers of hospitality. As for the maid who was the cause of the accident, she was a prey to so wild a grief that she could scarcely assist in bringing out such articles as it was possible to save.

When the engines came they began playing vigorously upon the conflagration: for, as there was a well in the coach-house, an ample supply of water was afforded. The wind was in such a direction that the flames were carried chiefly towards the point where my chamber had been situated, though Lady Lilla's was also on fire. But still it was the first-mentioned part of the dwelling which suffered first, and likewise most—as will presently be made apparent. Her ladyship, I should observe, displayed the utmost presence of mind: and we both of us helped in removing the articles in the ground-floor rooms, until the fire spreading thither rendered it impossible to return to the devoted edifice.

Several of those neighbours—who, as I have already said, made their appearance upon the spot—pressed her ladyship and me to retire from the scene and seek refuge in one of their houses. But the autumnal night was not cold enough to compel us to follow this counsel; and as Lady Lilla persisted in remaining in the garden to see the issue of the calamity, I of course kept her company. Three engines had arrived: but they came too late to save the villa from an almost complete destruction. For two hours did the conflagration last—

the flames during the second hour battling as it were against the jets of water for the mastery. The fire spread to all the outhouses; and at one time the heat was so intense that the lookers-on were compelled to retire to a considerable distance. At length the devouring element was subdued in every point except in Lilla's own chamber and the room above it, from the windows of which the lambent fire was still gushing forth. All of a sudden there was a tremendous crash: a dense volume of black smoke rolled upward: the roof had fallen in—the fire was crushed. The engines however continued to play for some litile while longer upon the ruined building. until the firemen were satisfied that their labours were no longer necessary.

It was too dark for us to discern the full extent of the damage wrought; and now Lady Lilla no longer refused the proposal that we should take refuge elsewhere. Several offers of hospitality were made us, as I have already stated: but her ladyship selected that of the gentleman to whom the nearest villa belonged;—and thither we repaired. Without entering into any unnecessary particulars, suffice it to say that by this gentleman and his wife (an elderly couple without any family) we were treated with the utmost kindness; and accommodation was likewise afforded to her ladyship's three female domestics,—the men-servants proceeding with the horses to the York and Albany Tavern at Camden Town.

Although I retired to rest, I could not close my eyes in slumber, so great was the excitement which I experienced. Therefore, having for some three or four hours tossed sleeplessly upon my pillow, I rose and dressed myself. The house where we had found such hospitable refuge, was only about two hundred yards from Claremont Villa; and I issued forth to visit the ruins. Thinking that Lady Lilla Essendine had not as yet left the chamber which had been assigned to her, I did not inquire for her—proceeded alone to our recent habitation. A police officer was there in charge of the numerous articles of furniture which had remained upon the lawn; and the gardener was contemplating the spectacle of the ruins with a rueful countenance I beheld no other persons: but the gardener hastened to inform me that Lady Lilla Essendine had just passed in amidst the scene of devastation.

I sped to join her—and quickly crossed the threshold of the doorway, from which the door itself had been burnt down. The outer walls were standing—some of the partition walls likewise: but the greater portion of the floors and roof were consumed or had fallen in. Nearly every window was burnt out: and I could not help shedding tears at this first glance a the wreck and skeleton of a dwelling which a few hours back was so elegant and perfect in all its appointments. I may here observe that Lady Lilla's furniture was insured to its full value: the house was a hired one, and likewise insured! so that in a pecuniary sense her ladyship had no reason to apprehend any loss.

I entered amongst the ruins, and speedily discovered Lilla. She was standing in the midst of ground floor apartment which had served as the dining-room, and precisely above which her own chamber had been situated. She was motionless as a statue, gazing upward through a vast aperture in what had been the ceiling of the dining-room and consequently the floor of the bedchamber. She did not immediately

become aware of my presence; and I mechanically looked up in the same direction towards which her own eyes were raised. I could scarcely repress an ejaculation when all in a moment the mystery of that little room which had joined of her own chamber was revealed. For the door had been burnt out of its setting; the floor in the immediate vicinage existed no longer; and a large portion of the wall of the inner room itself had fallen Everything in that room could be distinctly discerned! the devouring element had exposed that which my own conjectures never could have fathomed if I had lived for a thousand years!

That little room concerning which I had so bewildered myself with surmises, had been elegantly fitted up as an oratory, or private chapel, with all the appurtenances suitable to the Roman Catholic faith. There was an altar, surmounted by a crucifix: there were tall silver candlesticks—but the candles that were in them (if any at the time) had as a matter of course melted away by the heat of the fire. In front of the altar there was a footstool of crimson velvet; and a rosary was suspected against the wall. There had evidently been several small against the wall. There had evidently been several small pictures in that room; from the frames were still hanging there, though the canvas was scarched out of them. The flames themselves had however scarcely touched the interior of the little chapel—as was evident from the state of preservation in which were the appointment that I have enumerated.

My surprise was great; though the solution of the mystery relative to that little room was, after all, simple enough. I know that Lilla was a Roman Catholic: but I could not possibly have suspected her to be such a devotee to her creed as to have a private oratory in her dwelling for her own special devotions. At the same time it was a circumstance which made me think all the better of her: for though myself a Protestant, yet I could not do otherwise than respect the strong religious feeling so scientiously experienced by another.

For some minutes did I gaze up at that oratory which the conflagration had laid bare rather than destroyed, and which indeed the flames had spared more than any other portion of the building. Her ladyship at length became aware of my presence! and she started on perceiving me. But the next instant she took my hand with her usual kindness,—saying, "You have come, like me, my dear Ellen, to gaze upon the ruins of that which was so recently a pleasurably dwelling!"

"I did not know that you were there," I answered somewhat confusedly! "or else I should not have intruded——"

"It is no intrusion, my dear friend," she responded and then with a look of solemn awe, and even methought with a species of vague terror, she added, "Look! the fire has spared that place of private worship. Is it not miraculous? is it not a sign——"

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