

The  
MASKED  
BRIDAL

By  
MRS.  
GEORGIE  
SHELDON



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Title: The Masked Bridal

Author: Mrs. Georgie Sheldon

Release Date: July 27, 2009 [EBook #29524]

Language: English

\*\*\* START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE MASKED BRIDAL \*\*\*

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Transcriber's Note:

The Table of Contents is not part of the original book.

**THE MASKED  
BRIDAL**

**By MRS. GEORGIE SHELDON**

**AUTHOR OF**

**"Edrie's Legacy," "Max," "Faithful Shirley,"  
"Marguerites Heritage," "A True  
Aristocrat," etc.**

Seal

**A. L. BURT COMPANY**

**PUBLISHERS**

**NEW YORK**

**Copyright 1894, 1895, 1900**

**BY STREET & SMITH**

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# **THE MASKED BRIDAL.**



## PROLOGUE.

The most important and the most sacred event in a woman's life is her marriage. It should never be lightly considered, no matter what may be the allurements—honor, wealth, social position. To play at marriage, even for a plausible pretext, is likely to be very imprudent, and may prove a sin against both God and man.

The story we are about to tell chiefly concerns a refined and beautiful girl who, for the ostensible entertainment of a number of guests, agreed to represent a bride in a play.

The chief actors, just for the sake of illustrating a novel situation, and perhaps to excite curiosity among the spectators, were to have their faces concealed—it was to be a masked bridal.

Already the guests are assembled, and, amid slow and solemn music, the principals take their places.

The clergyman, enacted by a gentleman who performs his part with professional gravity and impressive effect, utters the solemn words calling for "any one who could show just cause why the two before him should not be joined in holy wedlock, to speak, or forever hold his peace."

At the sound of these words, the bride visibly shudders; but as she is masked, it can only be inferred that her features must indicate her intense emotion.

But why should she exhibit emotion in such a scene? Is it not a play? She cannot be a clever actress when she forgets, at such a time, that it is the part of a bride—a willing bride—to appear supremely happy on such a joyous occasion.

It is strange, too, that as the bride shudders, the bridegroom's hand compresses hers with a sudden vigorous clutch, as if he feared to lose her, even at that moment.

Was it merely acting? Was this "stage business" really in the play? Or was it a little touch of nature, which could not be suppressed by the stage training of those inexperienced actors?

The play goes on; the entranced spectators are now all aroused from the apathy



with which some of them had contemplated the opening part of the remarkable ceremony.

As the groom proceeds to place the ring upon the finger of the bride, she involuntarily resists, and tries to withdraw her hand from the clasp of her companion. There is an embarrassing pause, and for an instant she appears about to succumb to a feeling of deadly faintness.

She rouses herself, however, determined to go on with her part.

Every movement is closely watched by one of the witnesses—a woman with glittering eye and pallid cheek. When the bride's repugnance seemed about to overmaster her, and perhaps result in a swoon, this woman gave utterance to a sigh almost of despair and with panting breath and steadfast gaze anxiously watched and waited for the end of the exciting drama.

The grave clergyman notices the bride's heroic efforts to restrain her agitation, and the ceremony proceeds. At length the solemn sentence is uttered which proclaims the masked couple man and wife.

Then there is a great surprise for the spectators.

As they behold the bride and groom, now unmasked, there is a stare of wonder in every face, and expressions of intense amazement are heard on all sides.

Then it dawns upon the witnesses that the principal actors in the play are not the persons first chosen to represent the parts of the bride and groom.

Why was a change made? What means the unannounced substitution of other actors in the exciting play?

Ask the woman who caused the change—the woman who, with pallid cheek and glittering eye, had intently watched every movement of the apparently reluctant bride, evidently fearing the failure of the play upon which she had set her heart.

It became painfully evident that the play was not ended yet, and some there present had reason to believe that it was likely to end in a tragedy.

Now let us portray the events which preceded the masked bridal.

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# CHAPTER I.

## TWO UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

It was a cold, raw night in December, and the streets of New York city, despite their myriads of electric lights and gayly illuminated shop windows, were dismal and forlorn beyond description.

The sky was leaden. A piercing wind was blowing up from the East River, and great flakes of snow were beginning to fall, when, out of the darkness of a side street, there came the slight, graceful figure of a young girl, who, crossing Broadway, glided into the glare of the great arclight that was stationed directly opposite a pawnbroker's shop.

She halted a moment just outside the door, one slender, shabbily-gloved hand resting irresolutely upon its polished knob, while an expression of mingled pain and disgust swept over her pale but singularly beautiful face.

Presently, however, she straightened herself, and throwing up her head with an air of resolution, she turned the knob, pushed open the door, and entered the shop.

It was a large establishment of its kind, and upon every hand there were indications that that relentless master, Poverty, had been very busy about his work in the homes of the unfortunate, compelling his victims to sacrifice their dearest possessions to his avaricious grasp.

The young girl walked swiftly to the counter, behind which there stood a shrewd-faced Israelite, who was the only occupant of the place, and whose keen black eyes glittered with mingled admiration and cupidity as they fastened themselves upon the lovely face before him.

With an air of quiet dignity the girl lifted her glance to his, as she produced a ticket from the well-worn purse which she carried in her hand.

"I have come, sir, to redeem the watch upon which you loaned me three dollars last week," she remarked, as she laid the ticket upon the counter before him.

"Aha! an' so, miss, you vishes to redeem de vatch!" remarked the man, with a crafty smile, as he took up the ticket under pretense of examining it to make sure that it was the same that he had issued to her the week previous.

"Yes, sir."

"An' vat vill you redeem 'im mit?" he pursued, with a disagreeable leer.

"With the same amount that you advanced me, of course," gravely responded the girl.

"Ah! ve vill zee—ve vill zee! Where ish de money?" and the man extended a huge soiled hand to her.

"I have a five-dollar gold-piece here," she returned, as she took it from her purse and deposited it also upon the counter; for she shrank from coming in contact with that repulsive, unwashed hand.

The pawnbroker seized the coin greedily, his eyes gleaming hungrily at the sight of the yellow gold, while he examined it carefully to assure himself that it was genuine.

"So! so! you vill vant de vatch," he at length observed, in a sullen tone, as if he did not relish the idea of returning the valuable time-piece upon which he had advanced the paltry sum of three dollars. "Vell!" and irritably pulling out a drawer as he spoke, he dropped the coin into it. "Ah!" he cried, with a sudden start and an angry frown, as it dropped with a ringing sound upon the wood, "vat you mean? You would sheat me!—you would rob me! De money ish not goot—de coin ish counterfeit! I vill send for de officer—you shall pe arrested—you von little meek-faced robber! Ah!" he concluded, in a shrill tone of well-simulated anger, as he shook his fist menacingly before his companion.

The fair girl regarded him in frightened astonishment as he poured forth this torrent of wrathful abuse upon her, while her beautiful blue eyes dilated and her delicate lips quivered with repressed excitement.

"I do not understand you!—what do you mean, sir?" she at length demanded, when she could find voice for speech.

"You play de innocence very vell!" he sneered; then added, gruffly: "You vill not get der vatch, for you haf prought me bad money."

"You are mistaken, sir; I have just received that gold-piece from a respectable lawyer, for whom I have been working during the week, and I know he would not take advantage of me by paying me with counterfeit money," the young girl explained; but she had, nevertheless, grown very pale while speaking.

"Ah! maybe not—maybe not, miss; not if he knew it," said the pawnbroker, now adopting a wheedling and pitiful tone as he drew forth the shining piece and pushed it toward her. "Somebody may haf sheeted him; but it haf not der true ring of gold, and you'll haf to bring me der t'ree dollars some oder time, miss."

The girl's delicate face flushed, and tears sprang to her eyes. She stood looking sadly down upon the money for a moment, then, with a weary sigh, replaced it in her purse, together with the ticket, and left the shop without a word; while the tricky pawnbroker looked after her, a smile of cunning triumph wreathing his coarse lips, as he gleefully washed his hands, behind the counter, with "invisible soap in imperceptible water."

"Oh, mamma! poor mamma! what shall I do?" murmured the girl, with a heart-broken sob, as she stepped forth upon the street again. "I was so happy to think I had earned enough to redeem your precious watch, and also get something nice and nourishing for your Sunday dinner; but now—what can I do? Oh, it is dreadful to be so poor!"

Another sob choked her utterance, and the glistening tears rolled thick and fast over her cheeks; but she hurried on her way, and, after a brisk walk of ten or fifteen minutes, turned into a side street and presently entered a dilapidated-looking house.

Mounting a flight of rickety stairs, she entered a room where a dim light revealed a pale and wasted woman lying upon a poor but spotlessly clean couch.

The room was also clean and orderly, though very meagerly furnished, but chill and cheerless, for there was not life enough in the smoldering embers within the stove to impart much warmth with the temperature outside almost down to zero.

"Edith, dear, I am so glad you have come," said a faint but sweet voice from the bed.

"And, mamma, I never came home with a sadder heart," sighed the weary and almost discouraged girl, as she sank upon a low chair at her mother's side.

"How so, dear?" questioned the invalid; whereupon her daughter gave an account of her recent interview with the pawnbroker.

"I know Mr. Bryant would never have given me the gold-piece if he had not supposed it to be all right, for he has been so very kind and considerate to me all the week," she remarked, in conclusion, with a slight blush. "I am sure he would

exchange it, even now; but he left the office at four, and I do not know where he lives; so I suppose I shall have to wait until Monday; but I am terribly disappointed about the watch, while we have neither food nor fuel to get over Sunday with."

The sick woman sighed gently. It was the only form of complaint that she ever indulged in.

"Perhaps the money is not counterfeit, after all," she remarked, after a moment of thought. "Perhaps the pawnbroker did not want to give up the watch, and so took that way to get rid of you." "That is so! how strange that I did not think of it myself!" exclaimed Edith, starting eagerly to her feet, the look of discouragement vanishing from her lovely face. "I will go around to the grocery at once, and perhaps they will take the coin. What a comforter you always prove to be in times of trouble, mamma!" she added, bending down to kiss the pale face upon the pillow. "Cheer up; we will soon have a blazing fire and something nice to eat."

She again put on her jacket and hat, and drew on her gloves, preparatory to going forth to breast the storm and biting cold once more.

"I cannot bear to have you go out again," said her mother, in an anxious tone.

"I do not mind it in the least, mamma, dear," Edith brightly responded, "if I can only make you comfortable over Sunday. Next week I am to go again to Mr. Bryant, who thinks he can give me work permanently. You should see him, mamma," she went on, flushing again and turning slightly away from the eyes regarding her so curiously; "he is so handsome, so courteous, and so very kind. Ah! I begin to have courage once more," she concluded, with a little silvery laugh; then went out, shutting the door softly behind her.

Half an hour later she returned with her arms full of packages, and followed by a man bearing a generous basketful of coal and kindlings.

Her face was glowing, her eyes sparkling, and she was a bewildering vision of beauty and happiness.

"The money wasn't bad, after all mamma," she said, when the man had departed; "they didn't make the slightest objection to taking it at the grocery. I believe you were right, and that the pawnbroker did not want to give up the watch, so took that way to get rid of me. But I will have it next week, and I shall have a

policeman to go with me to get it."

"Did you tell the grocer anything about the trouble you have had?" the invalid inquired.

"No, mamma; I simply offered the coin in payment for what I bought, and he took it without a word," Edith replied, but flushing slightly, for she felt a trifle guilty about passing the money after what had occurred.

"I almost wish you had," said her mother.

"I thought I would, at first, but—I knew we must have something to eat, and fuel to keep us warm between now and Monday, and so I allowed the grocer to take it upon his own responsibility," the young girl responded, with a desperate little glitter in her lovely eyes.

Her companion made no reply, although there was a shade of anxiety upon her wan face.

Edith, removing her things, bustled about, and soon had a cheerful fire and an appetizing meal prepared.

Her spirits appeared to rise with the temperature of the room, and she chatted cheerfully while about her work, telling a number of interesting incidents that had occurred in connection with her employment during the week.

"Now come, mamma," she remarked, at length; "let me help you into your chair and wheel you up to the table, for supper is ready, and I am sure you will enjoy these delicious oysters, which I have cooked as you like them best."

Mother and daughter were chatting pleasantly, enjoying their meal, when the door of their room was thrown rudely open and two men strode into their presence.

Edith started to her feet in mingled indignation and alarm, then grew deadly pale when she observed that one of the intruders was an officer, and the other the grocer of whom she had made her recent purchases.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" she demanded, trying in vain to keep her tones steady and her heart from sinking with a terrible dread.

"There! Mr. Officer; that is the girl who passed the counterfeit money at my store," the grocer exclaimed, his face crimson with anger.

Edith uttered a smothered cry of anguish, then sank weakly back into her chair, as the man went forward to her side, laid his hand upon her shoulder, and remarked:

"You are my prisoner, miss."





## **CHAPTER II.**

## **A STANCH FRIEND MAKES A VAIN APPEAL.**

Beautiful Edith Allandale and her gentle, refined mother had been suddenly hurled from affluence down into the very depths of poverty.

Only two years previous to the opening of our story the world had been as bright to them as to any of the petted favorites of fortune who dwell in the luxurious palaces on Fifth avenue.

Albert Allandale had been a wealthy broker in Wall street; for years Fortune had showered her favors upon him, and everything he had touched seemed literally to turn to gold in his grasp.

His family consisted of his wife, his beautiful daughter, and two bright sons, ten and twelve years of age, upon whom the dearest hopes of his life had centered.

But like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, an illness of less than a week had deprived him of both of his sons.

Diphtheria, that fell destroyer, laid its relentless hand upon them, and they had died upon the same day, within a few hours of each other.

The heart-broken father was a changed man from the moment, when, sitting in speechless agony beside these idolized boys, he watched their young lives go out, and felt that the future held nothing to tempt him to live on.

His mind appeared to be impaired by this crushing blow; he could neither eat nor sleep; his business was neglected, and, day by day, he failed, until, in less than six months from the time that death had so robbed him, he had followed his boys, leaving his wife and lovely daughter to struggle as best they could with poverty; for their great wealth had melted like snow beneath the blazing sun when Mr. Allandale lost his interest in the affairs of the world.

Keenly sensitive, and no less proud—crushed by their many sorrows, the bereaved wife and daughter hid themselves and their grief from every one, in a remote corner of the great city. But misfortune followed misfortune—Mrs. Allandale having become a confirmed invalid—until they were reduced to the straits described at the opening of our story.

The week preceding they had spent their last dollar—obtained by pawning one after another of their old-time treasures—and Edith insisted upon seeking employment.

She had seen an advertisement for a copyist in one of the daily papers, and, upon answering it in person, succeeded in obtaining the situation with the young lawyer already mentioned.

Every day spent in her presence only served to make him admire her the more; and, before the week was out, he had altogether lost his heart to her.

When Saturday evening arrived, he paid her with the golden coin which was destined to bring fresh sorrow upon her, and she went out from his presence with a strange feeling of pride and independence over the knowledge that she had earned it with her own hands, and henceforth would be able to provide for her own and her mother's comfort.

But Royal Bryant had been conscience-smitten when he saw her beautiful face light up with mingled pride and pleasure as he laid that tiny piece of gold in her palm.

He would gladly have doubled the amount; but five dollars had been the sum agreed upon for that first week's work, and he feared that he would wound her pride by offering her a gratuity.

So he had told her that she would be worth more to him the next week, and that he would continue to increase her wages in proportion as she acquired speed and proficiency in her work.

Thus she had started forth, that dreary Saturday night, with a comparatively light heart, to redeem her watch, before going home to tell her mother her good news.

But, alas! how disastrously the day had closed!

"Come, miss," impatiently remarked the officer, as she sat with bowed head, her face covered with her hands, "get on your things! I've no time to be fooling away, and must run you into camp before it gets any later."

"Oh, what do you mean?" cried Edith, starting wildly to her feet. "Where are you going to take me?"

"To the station-house, of course, where you'll stay until Monday, when you'll be

taken to court for your examination," was the gruff reply.

"Oh, no! I can never spend two nights in such a place!" moaned the nearly frantic girl, with a shiver of horror. "I have done no intentional wrong," she continued, lifting an appealing look to the man's face. "That money was given to me for some work that I have been doing this week, and if any one is answerable for it being counterfeit, it should be the person who paid it to me."

"Who paid you the money?" the officer demanded.

"A lawyer for whom I have been copying—Mr. Royal Bryant; his office is at No. — Broadway."

"Then you'll have to appeal to him. But of course it's too late now to find him at his office. Where does he live?"

"I do not know," sighed Edith, dejectedly. "I have only been with him one week, and did not once hear him mention his residence."

"That's a pity, miss," returned the officer, in a gentler tone, for he began to be moved by her beauty and distress. The condition of the invalid, who had fallen back weak and faint in her chair when he entered, also appealed to him.

"Unless you can prove your story true, and make up the grocer's loss to him, I shall be obliged to lock you up to await your examination."

Edith's face lighted hopefully.

"Do you mean that if I could pay Mr. Pincher I need not be arrested?" she eagerly inquired.

"Yes; the man only wants his money."

"Then he shall have it," Edith joyfully exclaimed. "I will give him back the change he gave me, then I will go to Mr. Bryant the first thing Monday morning and tell him about the gold-piece, when I am sure he will make it all right, and I can pay Mr. Pincher for what I bought to-night."

"No, you don't, miss," here interposed the grocer himself. "I've had that game played on me too many times already. You'll just fork over five dollars to me this very night or off you go to the lock-up. I'm not going to run any risk of your skipping out of sight between now and Monday, and leaving me in the lurch."

"But I have no money, save the change you gave me," said Edith, wearily. "And do you think I would wish to run away when my mother is too sick to be moved?" she added, indignantly. "I could not take her with me, and I would not leave her. Oh, pray do not force me to go to that dreadful place this fearful night! I promise that I will stay quietly here and that you shall have every penny of your money on Monday morning."

"She certainly will keep her word, gentlemen," Mrs. Allandale here interposed, in a tremulous voice. "Do not force her to leave me, for I am very ill and need her."

"I'm going to have my five dollars now, or to jail she will go," was the gruff response of the obdurate grocer.

"Oh, I cannot go to jail!" wailed the persecuted girl.

Mrs. Allandale, almost unnerved by the sight of her grief, pleaded again with pallid face and quivering lips for her. But the man was relentless. He resolutely turned his back upon the two delicate women and walked from the room, saying as he went:

"Do your duty, Mr. Officer, and I'll be on hand Monday morning, in court, to tell 'em how I've been swindled."

With this he vanished, leaving the policeman no alternative but to enforce the law.

"Oh, mamma! mamma! how can I live and suffer such shame?" cried the despairing girl, as she sank upon her knees in front of the sick woman, and shuddered from head to foot in view of the fate before her.

Mrs. Allandale was so overcome that she could not utter one word of comfort. She was only able to lift one wasted hand and lay it upon the golden head with a touch of infinite tenderness; then, with a gasp, she fainted dead away.

"Oh, you have killed her!" Edith cried, in an agonized tone. "What shall I do? How can I leave her? I will not. Oh! will no one come to help me in this dreadful emergency?"

"Sure, Miss Allandale, ye know that Kate O'Brien is always willin' to lend ye a hand when you're in trouble—bless yer bonny heart!" here interposed a loud but kindly voice, and the next instant the good-natured face of a buxom Irishwoman

was thrust inside the door, which the grocer had left ajar when he went out. "What is the matter here?" she concluded, glancing from the officer to the senseless woman in her chair, and over whom Edith was hanging, chafing her cold hands, while bitter tears rolled over her face.

A few words sufficed to explain the situation, and then the indignation of the warm-hearted daughter of Erin blazed forth more forcibly than elegantly, and she berated the absent grocer and present officer in no gentle terms.

Kate O'Brien would gladly have advanced the five dollars to the grocer, but, unfortunately, she herself was at that moment almost destitute of cash.

"Come, Miss Allandale," said the officer, somewhat impatiently, "I can't wait any longer."

"Oh, mamma! how can I leave you like this?" moaned the girl, with a despairing glance at the inanimate figure which, as yet, had given no signs to returning life.

"She has only fainted, mavourneen," said Kate O'Brien, in a tender tone, for she at last realized that it would be worse than useless to contend against the majesty of the law. "She'll soon come to hersel', and ye may safely trust her wid me—I'll not lave her till ye come back again."

And with this assurance, Edith was forced to be content, for she saw, by the officer's resolute face, that she could hope for no reprieve.

So, with one last agonizing look, she pressed a kiss upon the pallid brow of her loved one; then, again donning her hat and shawl, she told the policeman that she was ready, and went forth once more into the darkness and the pitiless storm, feeling, almost, as if God himself had forsaken her, and wondering if she should ever see her dear mother alive again.



## **CHAPTER III.**

## THE YOUNG LAWYER EXPERIENCES TWO EXTRAORDINARY SURPRISES.

The next morning, in the matron's room of the Thirtieth street station-house, a visitor came to see Edith Allandale. The visitor was Kate O'Brien, who, after announcing the condition of the prisoner's mother, declared her willingness to aid Edith in any way in her power.

Edith intrusted a letter to her for Mr. Royal Bryant, and early Monday morning Kate was at the lawyer's office, and placed the missive in his hands.

The young man instantly recognized the handwriting of his fair copyist, and flushed to his brow at sight of it.

"Ah! she is ill and has sent me word that she cannot come to the office to-day!" he said to himself.

"Sit down, madam," he said to his visitor, and he eagerly tore open the letter and read the following:

"MR. BRYANT:—Dear Sir:—I am sorry to have to tell you that the five-dollar gold-piece which you gave me on Saturday evening was a counterfeit coin. I passed it at a grocery, near which I reside, in payment for necessaries which I purchased, and, half an hour later, was arrested for the crime of passing spurious money. I could not appeal to you at the time, for I did not know your address; but now I beg that you will come to my aid to-morrow morning, when I shall have to appear in court to answer the charge, for I do not know of any one else upon whom to call in my present extremity. Oh, pray come at once, for my mother is very ill and needs me.

"Respectfully yours,

"EDITH M. ALLANDALE."

Royal Bryant's face was ghastly white when he finished reading this brief epistle.

"Good heavens!" he muttered, "to think of that beautiful girl being arrested and



imprisoned for such an offense! Where is Miss Allandale?" he added, aloud, turning to Mrs. O'Brien, who had been watching him with a jealous eye ever since entering the room.

"In the Thirtieth street station-house, sir," she briefly responded.

"Infamous!" exclaimed the young man, in great excitement. "And has she been in that vile place since Saturday evening?"

"She has, sir; but not with the common lot; the matron has been very good to her, sir, and gave her a bed in her own room," the woman explained.

"Blessed be the matron!" was Royal Bryant's inward comment. Then, turning again to his companion, he inquired.

"What is your name, if you please, madam?"

"Kate O'Brien, at your service, sir."

"Thank you; and do you live near Miss Allandale?"

"Jist forninst her, sir—on the same floor, across the hall."

"She writes that her mother is very ill," proceeded the young man, referring again to the letter.

"Whisht, sir; the poor lady's dyin', sir," said Kate in a tone of awe.

"Dying!" exclaimed Royal Bryant, aghast.

"Yes, sir; she has consumption; and just afther the officer—bad luck to 'im!—took the young lady away, she had a bad coughin' spell, and burst a blood-vessel, and she has been failin' ever since," the woman explained, with trembling lips.

"Who is with Mrs. Allandale now?" questioned Mr. Bryant, with a look of deep anxiety.

"The docthor, sir; he promised to stay wid her till I come back."

"Well, then, Mrs. O'Brien, if you will be good enough to hurry back and care for Mrs. Allandale, I will go at once to her daughter; and I am very sure that I can secure her release within a short time. Tell her mother so, and that I will send her home immediately upon her release."

"Bless yer kind heart!" cried the woman, heartily, and she hurried away to take the blessed news to Edith's fast-failing mother.

The moment the door closed after her, Royal Bryant seized his overcoat and began to put it on again, his face aflame with mingled indignation and mortification.

"In a common city lock-up for the crime of passing counterfeit money!" he muttered, hoarsely. "And to think that I brought such a fate upon her!—I, who would suffer torture to save her a pang. Two nights and an endless day, and her mother dying at home!—how she must have suffered! I could go down upon my knees to ask her pardon, and yet I cannot understand it. That money came directly from the bank into my possession."

He was just fastening the last button of his coat when there came a knock upon his door.

"Come in," he said, but frowning with impatience at the unwelcome interruption and the probable detention which it portended.

An instant later a rather common-looking man, of perhaps forty years, entered the room.

"Ah, Mr. Knowles! good-morning, good-morning," said young Bryant, with his habitual cordiality. "What can I do for you to-day?"

"I—I have called to pay an installment upon what I owe you, Mr. Bryant," the man responded, flushing slightly beneath the genial glance of the lawyer.

"Ah, yes; I had forgotten that this was the date for the payment. I hope, however, that you are not inconveniencing yourself in making it to-day," remarked the young lawyer, as he observed that his client was paler than usual and wore an anxious, care-worn expression.

"There is nothing that inconveniences me more than debt," the man evasively replied, but quickly repressing a sigh, as he drew forth a well-worn purse, while his companion saw that his lips trembled slightly as he said it.

Opening the purse, Mr. Knowles produced a small coin and extended it to the lawyer.

It was a five-dollar gold-piece.

Mr. Bryant took it mechanically, and thanked him; but at the same time, feeling a strange reluctance in so doing, for he was sure the man needed the money for his personal necessities, while his small claim against him for advice rendered a few weeks previous could wait well enough, and he would never miss the amount.

He experienced a sense of delicacy, however, about giving expression to the thought, for he knew the gentleman to be both proud and sensitive, and he did not wish to wound him by assuming that he was unable to make the payment that had become due.

He stood awkwardly fingering the money and gazing absently down upon it as these thoughts flitted through his mind, and thinking, too, that it was somewhat singular that Mr. Knowles should have paid him in gold coin and of the very same denomination as he had given Edith less than forty-eight hours previous, and which had been the means of causing her such deep trouble.

Almost unconsciously, he turned the money over, his glance still riveted upon it.

As he did so he gave a violent start which caused his companion to regard him curiously.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, in vehement excitement, as he bent to examine the coin more closely, "this is the strangest thing that ever happened to me in all my experience!"



## **CHAPTER IV.**

## **A MYSTERY EXPLAINED.**

Mr. Knowles regarded his companion with undisguised astonishment.

"Is there anything wrong about the money?" he inquired, a gleam of anxiety in his eyes.

"Pardon me," said Royal Bryant, flushing, as he was thus recalled to himself; "you are justified in asking the question, and I trust you will not regard me as impertinently inquisitive if I inquire if you can remember from whom you received this piece of money."

"Certainly I remember," Mr. Knowles replied, but flushing painfully in his turn at the question.

"Will you kindly tell me the name of the person from whom you took it?"

Mr. Knowles appeared even more embarrassed than before, and hesitated about replying.

"I have a special and personal reason for asking you," Mr. Bryant continued. "See!" he added, holding the gold-piece before him where the light struck full upon it, "you perceive this coin is marked," and he pointed out some vertical scratches which had been made just inside the margin. "I made those marks myself."

"Can that be possible!" exclaimed his companion, astonished.

"Yes. This very piece of money was in my possession as late as five o'clock last Saturday afternoon."

"I cannot understand," said Mr. Knowles, looking mystified.

"Let me explain," returned Mr. Bryant. "I owed my copyist exactly five dollars, and, having nothing smaller in bills than tens, I was obliged to pay her with this coin. While she was getting ready to leave the office, I sat toying with it and scratched it, as you see, with the point of my penknife; then I gave it to Miss Allandale, and thought no more about the matter. But just before you came in this morning, I received a note from her saying she had been arrested for passing

the coin with which I had paid her, it having been declared counterfeit, and she begged me to come at once to her assistance and try to prove her innocence. I was just on the point of doing so when you called."

"What a very singular circumstance," Mr. Knowles remarked, reflectively. "It appears all the more so to me from the fact that I also received this piece of money no later than seven o'clock on last Saturday evening."

"You amaze me!" exclaimed Mr. Bryant. "Pray explain to me how you came by it—it may help to solve this very perplexing mystery, for I am confident that the coin is genuine, in spite of the trouble it has brought upon Miss Allandale."

"Yes, I will be frank with you," his companion returned, but flushing again, "and tell you that, in order to make this payment to you, I was obliged to borrow the money and gave, as security, a valuable mantel clock, which was one of my wife's wedding gifts. In other words, I pawned it. It goes against my pride to confess it; but the idea of debt is horrible to me: and, having been in very straitened circumstances of late, from sickness in my family and other causes, I had no other means of meeting my obligations to you, while I hoped to be able to redeem the clock before the time allotted should expire."

"Mr. Knowles, I thank you heartily for telling me this, while, at the same time, I am deeply pained," gravely returned Royal Bryant. "I would not have had you so pressed for a great deal; my claim against you can wait indefinitely, and you need feel no anxiety regarding it. Take your own time about it, for I am sure that I can safely trust a man to whom the idea of debt is so repulsive."

"You are very good," said Mr. Knowles, in a grateful tone.

"I shall return you this amount," the young lawyer resumed, "but in bills, for I wish to retain this gold-piece; and I beg that you will go at once and redeem your wife's clock. I am also going to throw a little business in your way, for I would like to retain you as a witness for Miss Allandale, and you shall be well paid for your services. Now please give me the name of the pawnbroker from whom you took the money."

"Solon Retz, No. ——— Third avenue."

"Ah, yes; I know him for a scheming and not over-scrupulous person. I fought a tough battle with him a year or so ago."

But Royal Bryant still looked greatly perplexed.

He could not understand how the pawnbroker could have had that particular gold-piece to loan upon Mr. Knowles' clock, before seven o'clock on Saturday evening, when Edith Allandale had been arrested, that same night, for trying to pass it off upon the grocer of whom she had spoken in her note.

To him it seemed an inexplicable mystery.

However, he knew—he could take his oath—that the coin which he now held in his hand was the identical piece of money which he had paid to his beautiful but unfortunate copyist for her last week's work, and he was also reasonably sure that it was not a counterfeit.

"I suppose you will have no objection to testifying as to how and from whom you received the money?" he inquired of Mr. Knowles, after a few moments' reflection.

"Certainly not, if such testimony will be of any benefit to the young lady's cause," he readily replied. "And," he added, "I can easily prove the truth of my assertions, as I have here the ticket which I received from the pawnbroker."

"Ah! that is well thought of, and will undoubtedly score a strong point for Miss Allandale," Mr. Bryant exclaimed, with animation. "And now allow me to advance you the fee for your services as a witness," he added, as he pressed a ten-dollar note into his companion's hand. "This will be sufficient to redeem your clock and remunerate you for the time you may lose in appearing as a witness. Hereafter, Mr. Knowles, if you find yourself short of cash, pray do not be troubled about what is owing me—do not try to pay it until it is perfectly convenient for you to do so."

"You are very considerate, Mr. Bryant," the man returned, with evident emotion. "I cannot tell you how your generosity touches me, for the world has gone very badly with me of late."

"Well, we will hope for better times in the future for you, sir," was the cheery response of the noble-hearted young lawyer. "Now I must be off," he added, "and I would like you to meet me at the Thirtieth street station-house in an hour from now. I shall know by that time what I shall be able to do for my young friend."

He bade the man good-morning and bowed him out of his office, and, five minutes later, was on his way to the assistance of beautiful Edith Allandale.

Before boarding a car, he stepped into a bank near-by and had the gold coin tested.

It proved to be just as he had thought—it was perfectly good, and if Edith had been arrested for passing it, some one would have to stand damages for having subjected her to such an injustice.

Upon his arrival at the station-house, and requesting an interview with Miss Allandale as her attorney, the police sergeant conducted him directly to the room occupied by Edith, who looked so pale and wan from anxiety and confinement that the young man's conscience smote him keenly, although his heart bounded with sudden joy when he saw how her sad face lighted at the sight of him.

"This is the most outrageous thing I ever heard of, Miss Allandale," he exclaimed, as he clasped her cold hand and looked regretfully into the heavy blue eyes raised to his.

"I was sure you would come," she murmured, with a sigh of relief, but flushing for an instant beneath his ardent gaze, while her lips quivered with suppressed emotion, for his tone of sympathy had almost unnerved her.

"Of course I would come—I would go to the ends of the earth to serve you," he began, eagerly. "I am filled with remorse when I think what you must have suffered and that I am responsible for your trouble, though unintentionally and unconsciously."

"Yes, I am sure you could not have known that the money was counterfeit," said Edith, wearily.

"And it was not," he quickly returned. "It is a genuine coin and negotiable anywhere."

"But I was told by two different persons that it was spurious," Edith replied, in a tone of surprise.

"Then you were misinformed in both cases, for I have had it tested at a bank, and it has been pronounced good," returned her companion.

"You have had it tested? How can that be possible, when the grocer who caused me to be arrested has the money in his possession this moment?" the young girl exclaimed, in amazement.



Royal Bryant smiled as he drew forth the half-eagle which he had received from Mr. Knowles, and laid it in her palm.

"That is the five-dollar gold-piece that I gave you on Saturday evening," he remarked, in a quiet tone.

"Have you seen the grocer? Did you get it from him?" Edith gasped.

"No; an old client of mine brought it to me, about half an hour ago, in part payment of a debt which he owes me."

"I do not understand—it cannot be the same," said Edith, with a look of perplexity.

"But it is," was the smiling reply. "Look at it closely, and you will find some fresh scratches upon one side of it—do you see?"

"Yes," the young girl admitted.

"Very well; I made them with my penknife during a fit of absent-mindedness, while you were putting on your hat and shawl on Saturday evening," Royal Bryant explained. "It was all the money I had, excepting some large bills, and I was obliged to give it to you, even though I knew it was not a convenient form—one is so liable to lose such a small piece. I am sure I do not know what possessed me to deface it in the way I did," he continued, after a slight pause; "but there the marks are, fortunately, and I could swear to the coin among a hundred others of the same denomination."

"Yes, I remember, now," Edith remarked, reflectively; "I noticed the gold-piece in your hands and that you were using your knife upon it; but how could it have come into the possession of your client? Surely the grocer would not have parted with it voluntarily, for it was all the proof he had against me."

"No; my client, Mr. Knowles, obtained it from a pawnbroker at No. ——— Third avenue," Mr. Bryant replied.

Instantly the red blood mounted to the girl's fair brow, and, like a flash, Royal Bryant comprehended how all her trouble had come about.

"Yes," she sighed, after a moment, as if in reply to some question from him, "the week before I went into your office I was obliged to borrow some money upon a beautiful watch of mamma's. It was a very valuable one, but the man would only

advance me three dollars upon it. Of course I felt that I must redeem it with the very first money I earned, and I went immediately to the pawnbroker's to get it on leaving your office. He seemed averse to the early redemption of the watch, and threw my money impatiently into the drawer. The next instant he gave it back to me, angrily telling me that it was counterfeit, and charging me with trying to cheat him. But, even now, I cannot understand—"

"So the pawnbroker threw your money into his drawer, did he?" interposed Mr. Bryant, eagerly grasping at this important point.

"Yes; but, as I said, he returned it immediately to me, and I was obliged to go home without my watch. I was in great distress because, Mr. Bryant, it was all the money I had, and there were things that mamma and I must have in order to be comfortable over Sunday," Edith confessed, with crimson cheeks and downcast eyes, the sight of which made her companion's heart ache for her. "Mamma suggested that the money might not be bad, after all," she continued, determined that he should know the whole truth about the matter; "that, possibly, the pawnbroker had taken that way to retain the watch, with the hope of ultimately securing it; so I started out to make my purchases. The grocer made no objection to the money and gave me my change without a word. But half an hour later he appeared with an officer and had me arrested. He would not have pressed the matter if I could have returned his money; but, as I could not, and he claimed he had suffered from so many similar cases of swindling, he was obdurate, and I was obliged to come here."

"It was shameful!" said the young lawyer, indignantly. "It was a heartless thing to do. But, my little friend, I think we have a very clear case, and you will soon be fully vindicated."

"Oh! do you? I shall be very grateful—" Edith began, then stopped, choking back a sob that had almost burst from her trembling lips.

"I see you do not quite comprehend how that can be," continued her friend, ignoring her emotion. "But the piece of money which the pawnbroker pretended to return to you was not the same that you had received from me—it was a spurious one which he had at hand for the express purpose evidently of tricking the unwary, and Mr. Solon Retz will, ere long, be compelled to exchange places with you, if I can possibly bring him to justice."

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## **CHAPTER V.**

## A MOTHER'S LAST REQUEST.

Two hours later, Royal Bryant was at the pawnbroker's shop, and had redeemed Edith's watch, much against the wish of the money-lender, who desired to retain it. And as the lawyer placed the watch in his pocket, he made a sign to an officer on the street, who had accompanied him to the spot.

Solon Retz was astounded when he found himself a prisoner, on the charge of passing counterfeit money. He was hurried to court, and the judge investigated the case at once. Mr. Bryant and Mr. Knowles gave their testimony, and it was conclusively demonstrated that the spurious coin must have come from the pawnbroker's drawer.

At Royal Bryant's suggestion the pawnbroker was ordered to be searched, when no less than three more bogus pieces were found concealed upon his person.

This was deemed sufficient proof of his guilt, without further testimony, and he was sentenced to four years' imprisonment, without Edith having been called to the witness stand to testify against him.

As the crestfallen pawnbroker was led away, Royal Bryant went eagerly to Edith's side.

"You are free, Miss Allandale," he exclaimed, with a radiant face, "and I think we are to be congratulated upon having made such quick work of the case."

"It is all owing to your cleverness," Edith returned, lifting a pair of grateful eyes to his face. "How can I thank you?"

"You do not need to do that, for I feel that I alone have been to blame for all your trouble," he said, in a self-reproachful tone; then he added, with a roguish gleam in his fine eyes: "I shall never be guilty of paying my copyist in gold again. Now come, I have a carriage waiting for you and will send you directly home to your mother," the young man concluded, as he lifted her shawl from the chair where she had been sitting and wrapped it about her shoulders.

Edith followed him to the street, where a hack stood ready to take her home.

Mr. Bryant assisted her to enter it, when he laid a small package in her lap.

"It is your watch," he said, in a low tone. Then, extending his hand to her, he added: "I shall not ask you to return to the office for two or three days—you need rest after your recent anxiety and excitement, while I am to be away until Wednesday noon. Come to me on Thursday morning, if you feel able, when I shall have plenty of work for you."

He pressed the hand he was holding with an unconscious fondness which brought a rich color into the young girl's face, then, closing the carriage door, he gave the order to the coachman, smiled another adieu, as he lifted his hat to her, and the next moment Edith was driven away.

There was a glad light in her eyes, a tender smile on her red lips, and, in spite of her poverty and many cares, she was, for the moment, supremely happy, for Royal Bryant's manner had been far more suggestive to her than he had been aware of, and she was thrilled to her very soul by the consciousness that he loved her.

She sat thus, in happy reverie, until the carriage turned into the street where she lived; then, suddenly coming to herself, her attention was again attracted to the package in her lap.

"There is something besides mamma's watch here!" she murmured, as she noticed the thickness of it.

Untying the string and removing the wrapper, she found a pretty purse with a silver clasp lying upon the case containing the watch.

With burning cheeks she opened it, and found within a crisp ten-dollar note and Royal Bryant's card bearing these words upon the back:

"I shall deem it a favor if you will accept the inclosed amount, as a loan, until you find yourself in more comfortable circumstances financially.  
Yours, R.B."

Edith caught the purse to her lips with a thrill of joy.

"How kind! how delicate!" she murmured. "He knew that I was nearly penniless—that I had almost nothing with which to tide over the next few days, during his absence. He is a prince—he is a king among men, and I—"

A vivid flush dyed her cheeks as she suddenly checked the confession that had almost escaped her lips, her head drooped, her chest heaved with the rapid

beating of her heart, as she realized that her deepest and strongest affections had been irrevocably given to the noble-hearted young man who had been so kind to her in her recent trouble.

The carriage stopped at last before the door of her home—if the miserable tenement-house could be designated by such a name—and she sprang eagerly to the ground as the coachman opened the door for her to alight.

"The fare is all paid, miss," he said, respectfully, as she hesitated a moment; then she went bounding up the stairs to be met on the threshold of her room by Kate O'Brien—who had seen the carriage stop—with her finger on her lips and a look in her kind, honest eyes that made the girl's heart sink with a sudden shock.

"My mother!" she breathed, with paling lips.

"Whisht, mavourneen!" said the woman, pitifully; then added, in a lower tone: "She has been mortal ill, miss."

"And now?" panted Edith, leaning against the door-frame for support.

"Sh! She is asleep."

Edith waited to hear no more. Something in the woman's face and manner filled her with a terrible dread.

She pushed by her, entered the room, and glided swiftly but noiselessly to the bed, looked down upon the scarcely breathing figure lying there.

It was with difficulty that she repressed a shriek of agony at what she saw, for the shadow of death was unmistakably settling over the beloved face.

The invalid stirred slightly upon her pillow as Edith came to her side and bent over her.

"My darling," she murmured weakly, as her white lids fluttered open, and she bent a look full of love upon the fair face above her, "I—am going—"

"No, no, mamma!" whispered the almost heart-broken girl, but struggling mightily with her agony and to preserve calmness lest she excite the invalid.

"Bring me the—Japanese box—quick!" the dying woman commanded, in a scarcely audible tone.

Without a word Edith darted to a closet, opened a trunk, and from its depths

drew forth a beautiful casket inlaid with mother-of-pearl and otherwise exquisitely decorated.

"The—key," gasped the sick one, fumbling feebly among the folds of her night-robe.

Edith bent over her and unfastened a key from a golden chain which encircled her mother's neck.

"Open!" she whispered, glancing toward the casket.

The girl, wondering, but awed and silent, unlocked the box and threw back the cover, thus revealing several packages of letters and other papers neatly arranged within it.

Mrs. Allandale reached forth a weak and bloodless hand, as if to take something out of the box, when she suddenly choked, and in another instant the red life-current was flowing from her lips.

"Letters—burn—" she gasped, with a last expiring effort, and then became suddenly insensible.

In an agony of terror, Edith dashed the box upon the nearest chair and began to chafe the cold hand that hung over the side of the bed, while Mrs. O'Brien came forward, a look of awe on her face.

The frail chest of the invalid heaved two or three times, there was a spasmodic twitching of the slender fingers lying on the young girl's hand, then all was still, and Edith Allandale was motherless.



## **CHAPTER VI.**



## A HERITAGE OF SHAME.

We will not linger over the sad details of the ceremonies attending Mrs. Allandale's burial. Suffice it to say that on Tuesday afternoon her remains were borne away to Greenwood, and laid to rest, in the family lot, beside those gone before, after which Edith returned to her desolate abode more wretched than it is possible to describe.

She had made up her mind, however, that she could not remain there any longer—that she must find a place for herself in a different locality and among a different class of people. This she knew she could do, since she had the promise of permanent work and now had only herself to care for.

The change, too, must be made upon the following day, as Mr. Bryant would expect her at his office on Thursday morning.

There was much to be done, many things to be packed for removal, while what she did not care to retain must be disposed of; and, eager to forget her grief and loneliness—for she knew she would be ill if she sat tamely down and allowed herself to think—she began at once, upon her return from the cemetery, to get ready to leave the cheerless home where she had suffered so much.

She decided, first of all, to pack all wearing apparel; and, on going to her closet to begin her work, the first thing her eyes fell upon was the casket of letters, which her mother had requested her to bring to her just before she died.

The sight of this unnerved her again, and, with a moan of pain, she sank upon her knees and bowed her head upon it.

But the fountain of her tears had been so exhausted that she could not weep; and, finally becoming somewhat composed, she took the beautiful box out into the room and sat down near a light to examine its contents.

"Mamma evidently wanted these letters destroyed," she murmured, as she threw back the cover. "I will do as she wished, but I will first look them over, to be sure there is nothing of value among them."

She set about her task at once and found that they were mostly missives from intimate friends, with quite a number written by herself to her mother, while she

was away at boarding-school.

All these she burned after glancing casually at them. Nothing then remained in the box but a small package of six or eight time-yellowed epistles bound together with a blue ribbon.

"What peculiar writing!" Edith observed, as she separated one from the others and examined the superscription upon the envelope. "Why, it is postmarked Rome, Italy, away back in 18—, and addressed to mamma in London! That must have been when she was on her wedding tour!"

Her curiosity was aroused, and, drawing the closely-written sheet from its inclosure, she began to read it.

It was also dated from Rome, and the girl was soon deeply immersed in a story of intense and romantic interest.

She readily understood that the letter had been written by a dear friend of Mrs. Allandale's youth—one who had been both school and roommate, and who unreservedly confided all her secrets and experiences to her bosom companion. And yet, it was strange, Edith thought, that she had never heard her mother speak of this friend.

It seemed that there had been quite an interval in their correspondence, for the writer spoke of the surprise which her friend would experience upon receiving a letter from her from that locality, when she had probably believed her to be in her own home, living the quiet life of a dutiful daughter.

Then it spoke of an "ideal love" that "had come to beautify her life;" of a noble and wealthy artist who had won her heart, but who, for some unaccountable reason, had not been acceptable to her parents, and they had sternly rejected his proposal for her hand.

Next came the *denouement*, which told that the girl had eloped with her lover and flown with him to Italy.

"I suppose it was not the right thing to do, darling," the missive ran; "but papa, you know, is a very austere, relentless man, and when he has once made up his mind, there is no hope of ever turning him; so I have taken my fate into my own hands—or, rather, I have given it into the keeping of my dear one, and we are so happy, Edith darling, and lead an ideal life in this quaint old city of the seven hills, at whose feet runs, like a thread of gold, the yellow Tiber. My husband is

everything to me—so noble, so kind, so generous; it is so very strange that papa could not like him—that is the only drop of bitterness in my overflowing cup of happiness."

There was much more of the same tenor, from which it is not necessary to quote; and, after reading the letter through, Edith took up another, interested to know how the pretty love-story of her mother's friend would terminate. The second one, written a month later, was more subdued, but not less tender, although the young girl thought she detected a vein of sadness running through it.

The next two or three mentioned the fact that the writer was left much alone, her "dear one" being obliged to be away a great deal of the time, upon sketching expeditions, etc.

After an interval of three months another letter spoke in the fondest manner of the "dear little stranger," that had come to bless and cheer her loneliness—"lonely, dear Edith, because my husband's art monopolizes his time, while he is often absent from home a week at a time in connection with it, and I do not know what I should do, in this strange country away from all my friends, if it were not for my precious baby girl whom I have named for you, as I promised, in memory of those happy days which we spent together at Vassar."

"Then mamma's friend had a daughter, who was also named Edith," mused our fair heroine, breaking in upon her perusal of the letter. "I wonder if she is living, and where? Those letters tell me nothing, give no last name by which to identify either the writer or her husband."

She turned back to the epistle, and read on:

"She is such a comfort to me," it ran, "and gives me an object in life—something besides myself and my trou"—these last three words were crossed out—"to think about. When will you come to Rome, dear Edith? Your last letter was dated from St. Petersburg. I am very anxious that you should see your little namesake, and make me that long-promised visit."

There was scarcely a word in this letter referring to her husband, except those three crossed-out words; but it overflowed with praises and love of her beautiful child, although it was evident that the young wife was far from experiencing the conjugal happiness that had permeated her previous missives.

There was only one more letter in the package, and Edith's face was very grave

and sympathetic as she drew it from its envelope.

"I am sure that her husband proved to be negligent of and unkind to her," she murmured, "and that she repented her rashness in leaving her home and friends. Oh, I wonder why girls will be so foolish and headstrong as to go directly contrary to the advice of those who love them best, and run away with men of whom they know comparatively nothing!"

With a sigh of regret for the unfortunate wife, of whom she had been reading, she unfolded the letter in her hands and began to read, little dreaming what strange things she was to learn from it.

"Oh, Edith darling," it began, "how can I tell you?—how can I write of the terrible calamity that has overtaken me? My heart is broken—my life is ruined, and all because I would not heed those who loved me, and who, I now realize, were my best and kindest counselors. I could bear it for myself, perhaps—I could feel that it was but a just judgment upon me for my obstinacy and unfilial conduct, and so drag out my weary existence in submission to the inevitable; but when I think of my innocent babe—my lovely Edith—your namesake! oh! I would never have had her christened thus, I could not have insulted you so, had I known! I feel almost inclined to doubt the justice and love of God—if, indeed, there is a God."

The letter here looked as if the writer must have been overcome with her wretchedness, and wept tears of bitter despair, for it was badly blurred and defaced.

But Edith, her face now absolutely colorless, read eagerly on.

"I cannot bear it and live," the writer resumed, "and so—I am going to—die. Edith, my husband—no, my betrayer, I ought rather to say—has deserted me! He has gone to Florence with a beautiful Italian countess, who is also very rich, and is living with her there in her elegant palace, just outside the city. He has long been attentive to her, but I never dreamed how far matters had gone until yesterday, when I came upon them, unawares, in Everard's studio, and heard him tell her how he loved her—that 'I was not his wife, only his ——' I cannot write the vile word that makes my flesh creep with horror. Then I learned of his base conduct to me, whom, as he expressed it, he 'had cleverly deceived, and coaxed to run away with him to while away his solitude during his sojourn in a strange country.' It is a wonder that I did not drop dead where I stood—slain by the dreadful truth; but the wicked lovers did not dream of being overheard, and so I

listened to the whole of their vile plot and then stole away to try and decide upon a course of action. When Everard came home, I charged him with his perfidy. Then—pity me, Edith—he boldly told me that he was weary of me; that he would pay me a handsome sum of money and I might take my child and go back to my parents! Oh! I cannot go into details, or tell you what I have suffered—no one will ever know that but God! Why, oh, why does He permit such evil to exist? He does not—there is no God! there is no God!"

There was a huge blot here, as if the pen had fallen from the fingers that had dared to deny the existence of Deity; then the missive was resumed in a different tone, as if a long interval of thought had intervened.

"Edith, I am calmer now, and I am going to ask a great favor of you. You are happily married, you have a noble husband and abundant means, and you know we once pledged ourselves to befriend each other, if either should ever find herself in trouble. Presuming upon that pledge, I am going to ask if you will take my darling, my poor innocent little waif, bring her up as your own, and never let her know anything about the stain that rests upon her birth? She is pure; she is not to blame for the sins of her parents, and I cannot bear the thought of her growing up to learn of her heritage of shame, as she would be sure to do if I should live and rear her as my child. Your last letter tells me that you will be in Rome in less than a fortnight. I cannot meet you—I can never again meet any one whom I have known; and so, Edith—I am going to die. I give my child to you—I believe you will not refuse my last request—and you will find her, with the woman who nursed me when she was born, at No. 2 Via del Vecchia. The woman has my instructions—she believes that I am only going away on a little trip with my husband; but you will show her this letter, and prove to her that you have authority to take the child away. When you go home, you will take her with you, as your own, and no one need ever know that she is not your own. Do not ever reveal the truth to her; let her grow up happy and care-free, like other girls who are of honorable birth; and if the dead can watch over and shield the living, you and yours shall be so shielded and watched over by your lost but still loving. BELLE."

"She was my mother! I am that child of shame!" came hoarsely from Edith's bloodless lips as she finished reading that dreadful letter.

Then the paper slipped from her nerveless fingers, her head dropped unconsciously upon the table before her, and she knew nothing more until, long afterward, when she awoke from her swoon to find her lamp gone out and the

room growing cold, while her heart felt as if it had been paralyzed in her bosom.



## **CHAPTER VII.**

## TWO NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

Edith, when consciousness returned, had not a doubt that the letters, which she had been reading, had been penned by the hand of her own mother; that she was that little baby who had been born in Rome—that child of shame whose father had so heartlessly deserted it; whose mother, her brain turned by her suffering and wrongs, had planned to take her own life, rather than live to taint her little one's future with the shadow of her own disgrace.

The knowledge of this seemed to blight, as with a lightning flash, every hope of her life.

She groped her way to the bed, for she was becoming benumbed with the cold, and threw herself upon it, utterly wretched, utterly hopeless. For hours she lay there in a sort of stupor, conscious only of one terrible fact—her shame—her ruined life!

She had never dreamed, until within that hour, that she was not the daughter of those whom she had always known as her father and mother.

She had known that they had gone abroad immediately after their marriage, and had spent more than a year visiting foreign countries.

She had been told that she was born in Rome, in 18—, and she now realized that the letters which she had just read had been mostly written during the same year.

Mrs. Allandale had never meant that she should learn this terrible secret, and that is why she had been so anxious during her last moments that the contents of the Japanese box should be destroyed.

Edith wondered why she had kept the letters at all—why she had not destroyed them immediately upon adopting her, and thus prevented the possibility of a revelation like this.

To be sure, no one save herself need ever know of the fact unless she chose to disclose it; nevertheless, she felt just as deeply branded by it as if all the world had known of it.

"Oh, I had begun to hope that—" she began, then abruptly ceased, a burning



flush suffusing her face as her thoughts thus went out toward Royal Bryant, whose eyes had only the day before told her, as plainly as eyes could speak, that he loved her, while her heart had thrilled with secret joy over the revelation, and the knowledge that her own affection had been irrevocably given to him, even though they had known each other so short a time.

Even in the midst of her sorrow over her dead, the thought that she loved and was beloved had been like the strains of soothing music to her, and she had looked forward to her return to the young lawyer's office as to a place of refuge, where she would meet with kindness and sympathy that would comfort her immeasurably.

But these beautiful dreams had been ruthlessly shattered; she could never be anything to Royal Bryant—he could never be anything to her, after learning what she had learned that night.

Edith determined to leave New York at once. With this object in view, she disposed of most of her furniture to a broker, who gave her sixty dollars for it. She reserved articles she presented to her staunch friend, Kate O'Brien. These matters attended to, she wrote a letter to Mr. Bryant, mailed it, and a few hours later was on the train, en route to Boston.

On Thursday morning Mr. Bryant, returning to town from a business trip, cheerfully entered his office, expecting to behold there the radiant face of Edith. To his great disappointment, she was absent; and her absence was explained in the appended letter, which he read with dismay and dejection.

"DEAR MR. BRYANT:—Inclosed you will find the amount which you so kindly loaned me on Monday, and without which I should have been in sore straits. On reaching home that day, I found my mother dying. She was buried yesterday afternoon, and I am now entirely alone in the world. I find that circumstances will not permit me to return to your employ, and when you receive this I shall have left New York. Pray do not think that because I do not see you and thank you personally before I go, I am ungrateful for all your recent and unexampled kindness to me. I am not, I assure you; I shall never forget it—it will be one of the sacred memories of my life, that in you, in a time of dire need, I found a true friend and helper.

Sincerely yours,

EDITH ALLANDALE."

The lawyer lost no time in hastening to Edith's late residence. There he learned from Kate O'Brien that Edith had already gone, but she knew not her destination. He stated that he wished to consult the young lady upon a business matter and that if Mrs. O'Brien should learn of her address, it would be considered a great favor if she would bring it to him. This the kind-hearted Irish woman agreed to do, and with a heavy heart the young lawyer returned to his place of business.

Meanwhile, Edith was being wheeled along the rails toward her destination. When the train reached New Haven, feeling faint, for she had not been able to eat much breakfast, she got out to purchase a lunch.

She entered the station and bought some sandwiches, together with a little fruit, and then started to return to the train.

Just in front of her she noticed a fine-looking, richly-clad couple who were evidently bound in the same direction.

The gentleman opened the door for his companion to pass out, but as she did so, the heel of her boot caught upon the threshold, and she would have fallen heavily to the platform if Edith had not sprung forward and caught her by the hand which she threw out to save herself.

As it was, she was evidently badly hurt, for she turned very white and a sharp cry of pain was forced from her lips.

"Are you injured, madam? Can I do anything for you?" Edith inquired, while her husband, springing to her aid, exclaimed, in a tone of mingled concern and impatience:

"What have you done, Anna?"

"Turned my ankle, I think," the woman replied, as she leaned heavily against his shoulder for support.

Edith stooped to pick up the beautiful Russia leather bag which she had dropped as she stumbled, and followed the couple to the train, where, with the help of a porter, the injured lady was assisted into a parlor car.

The one adjoining it was the common passenger coach in which Edith had ridden from New York.

"Here is madam's bag, sir," she remarked to the gentleman, as, supporting his

wife with one arm, he was about to pass into the Pullman.

"Are you going on this train?" he inquired, looking back over his shoulder at her.

"Yes, sir; but I do not belong in the parlor car."

"Never mind; we will fix that all right. Bring the bag along, if you will be so kind," he returned, as he went on with his companion.

So Edith followed them to the little state-room at one end of the car, where madam sank heavily into a chair, looking as if she were ready to swoon.

"Oh, get off my boot!" she pleaded, thrusting out her injured foot.

Edith drew forward a hassock for it to rest upon, and then, with a face full of sympathy, dropped upon her knees and began to unbutton the boot, which, however, was no easy matter, as the ankle was already much swollen.

The train began to move just at this moment, and the young girl started to her feet, an anxious look sweeping over her face.

"Never mind," said the gentleman, reassuringly. "Unless you have friends aboard the train to be troubled about you, I will take you back to your car presently."

"I have no one—I am traveling alone," Edith responded, and flushing slightly, as she encountered the gaze of earnest admiration which he bestowed upon her.

The gentleman's face lighted at her reply.

"Then would it be presuming upon your kindness too much to ask you to remain with my wife?" he inquired. "I am perfectly helpless, like most men, when any one is ill and we know no one on the train."

"I will gladly stay, and do whatever I can for her," eagerly returned Edith, who felt that it would be a great relief and safeguard if she could complete her journey under the protection of these prepossessing people; while, too, it would give her something to think of and keep her from dwelling upon her own sorrows.

As Edith, from time to time, continued her ministering to the injured foot, rubbing it with alcohol, to reduce the inflammation, she was questioned by her new acquaintances, and informed them of her recent bereavement and of her lonely condition, and stated that she was going to Boston to try to secure

employment.

She was applying the alcohol when the lady said:

"That will do for the present, Miss —— What shall I call you, please?" she remarked, signifying that she did not care to have the foot rubbed any longer at that time.

"Edith Allen—Oh, what have I done?" the young girl suddenly cried out, in a voice of pain, as the woman winced and gave vent to a moan beneath her touch.

"Nothing—do not be troubled, dear—only you happened to touch a very tender spot," exclaimed the lady, trying to smile reassuringly into the girl's startled face. "So your name is Edith Allen; that sounds very nice," she continued. "I am fond of pretty names as I am of pretty people."

Edith opened her lips to correct her regarding her name; then suddenly checked herself.

It did not matter, she thought, if they did not know her full name. She might never see them again; she had a right to use only the first half of her surname, if she chose, and it would not be nearly so conspicuous as Allandale, which was so familiar in certain circles in New York.

Thus she concluded to let the matter rest as it was.

The acquaintance thus begun was productive of an utterly unexpected result. Before the trip was ended, the lady had induced Edith to accept the position of traveling companion to her, at a salary of twenty-five dollars a month. She stated that about a month previous she had lost the services of the female who had filled the position, and until this time had been unable to find a suitable person for the place.

Edith decided to try the position for a month; "then," she added, "if I meet your requirements, we can arrange for a longer time."

"Very well; I am pleased with that arrangement. And now, Edith—of course I am not going to be so formal as to address you as Miss Allen—"

"Certainly not," interposed Edith, with a charming little smile and blush.

"I was about to remark," the lady went on, "that I think it is time we were formally introduced to you. My husband is known as Gerald Goddard, Esq., of

No. — Commonwealth avenue, Boston, and I am—Mrs. Goddard."

Edith wondered why she should have paused before speaking thus of herself; why she should have shot that quick, flashing glance into her husband's face as she did so.

She was a very handsome woman of perhaps forty-two or forty-three years. She was slightly above the medium height, with a magnificently proportioned figure. Her hair was coal-black, with a tendency to curl; her eyes were of the same color, very large and brilliant, and rendered peculiarly expressive by the long raven lashes which shaded them. Her complexion was a pale olive, clear and smooth as satin; her features were somewhat irregular, but singularly pleasing when she was animated; her cheeks slightly tinted, her lips a vivid scarlet, her teeth white as alabaster.

Later, when Edith saw her arrayed for an evening reception, she thought her the most brilliantly handsome woman she had ever seen.

As Mrs. Goddard finished speaking, Edith involuntarily glanced up at Mr. Gerald Goddard, when she was startled to find him sharply scrutinizing her, with a look which seemed to be trying to read her through and through.

His glance sent a strange chill running through her veins—a sensation almost of fear and repulsion; and she found herself hoping that she would not be obliged to see very much of the gentleman, even though she was destined to become an inmate of his home.

He was evidently somewhat older than his wife, for his hair was almost white and his face somewhat lined—whether from time, care, or dissipation, Edith could not quite determine.

He would have been called and was regarded by the society in which he moved as a remarkably handsome and distinguished looking man, who entertained "like a prince," and possessed an exhaustless fund of wit and knowledge.

Nevertheless, Edith was repelled by him, and felt that he was not a man to be either trusted or loved, even though she had not been an hour in his presence before she was made to realize that his wife adored him.

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## **CHAPTER VIII.**

## THE VENOM OF JEALOUSY.

And thus Edith became companion to the wife of the wealthy and aristocratic Gerald Goddard, who was known as one of Boston's millionaires.

They had a beautiful home on Commonwealth avenue, where they spent their winters, a fine estate in Wyoming, besides a villa at Newport, all of which were fitted up with an elegance which bespoke an abundance of means. And so Edith was restored to a life of luxury akin to that to which she had always been accustomed, previous to the misfortunes which had overtaken her less than two years ago.

Her duties were comparatively light, consisting of reading to Mrs. Goddard, whenever she was in the mood for such entertainment; singing and playing to her when she was musically inclined; and accompanying her upon drives and shopping expeditions, when she had no other company.

Edith, however, was not long in the household before she made the discovery that there was a skeleton in the family. At times Mr. Goddard was morose and irritable, and his wife displayed symptoms of intense jealousy. About five weeks after Edith's installation in the home, Mrs. Goddard's brother, Monsieur Correlli, a young sculptor, came there, on a visit to his sister. He was handsome and talented, and had come from France, to "do the United States," during a long vacation.

Mrs. Goddard was proud of her brother, and often attended receptions and parties with him as her escort, and was delighted to show him off to her friends and acquaintances in the most select of Boston society.

On returning to her home, after one of these receptions, she heard merry laughter in the library. Listening attentively, she discovered that it emanated from her husband and Edith, who sometimes, at his request, read to him during the frequent absences of his wife.

The demon of jealousy at once took possession of her. Suddenly entering the library she requested Edith to at once attend her in her boudoir. On arriving there the enraged woman gave way to her passion of jealousy. In blunt words she taunted the girl with attempting to steal the affections of her husband, and closed

her bitter comments with the threat that "the woman who tried to win my husband from me would never accomplish her purpose. *I would kill her!*"

Edith did her best to assure the angry woman that her suspicions were unfounded, and in a little time Mrs. Goddard was half convinced that she had been too hasty in her accusations.

That night the pure girl calmly deliberated upon the subject, and recalled several occasions when Mr. Goddard had seemed to be deeply absorbed in the contemplation of her features, eyeing her with glances of undisguised admiration and rapture. She determined, therefore, to be a little more circumspect hereafter, and avoid giving him such opportunities.

Another trial awaited her about a week later. Emil Correlli had become quite attentive to her, seeking every chance to be alone with her, showering compliments upon her, and extolling her charms. On one of these occasions he was bold enough to propose marriage, and, before she could recover from her astonishment, had the effrontery to steal a kiss from her unwilling lips.

This bold affront, added to the previous unfounded accusations of Mrs. Goddard made Edith decide to leave the house at once. She announced her decision to her mistress; but that lady, in great humiliation, begged her to overlook her brother's impetuosity, saying that his conduct should be considered only "a tribute to her manifold charms," and that hereafter she would have no cause for complaint of either him or her.

The proud woman's deep contrition, and her earnest appeals, had the effect intended, and Edith decided to remain.

That evening a prolonged interview occurred between Mrs. Goddard and her brother. The result of it was that the sister agreed to do her utmost to place Edith beyond the reach of her husband by combining a scheme which would make her the bride of Emil Correlli.

Some days elapsed, and then an incident worthy of record occurred. Edith had been out for a stroll, and, just as she was retracing her steps along Commonwealth avenue, an elegant carriage came slowly around the corner. The driver was in dark green livery, and seemed to be under the influence of stimulants. Suddenly he leaned sideways, and fell off the box, landing on the ground.



Edith impulsively started forward, shouted "Whoa!" to the horses, and lifted the reins. The animals stopped immediately, and in a moment a lovely face was thrust from the carriage window, and a sweet voice asked,

"Thomas, what is the matter?—what has happened?"

She stepped from the carriage and was soon informed of the accident, and its probable cause. She was a tall, elegantly-formed woman, of perhaps forty-three years, with large, dark brown eyes and rich brown hair. Her skin was fair and flawless, as that of a girl of twenty, with a delicate flush upon her cheeks, and Edith thought her face the most beautiful she had ever seen.

A policeman presently appeared upon the scene, and the lady requested him to secure some competent person who would drive the vehicle to its stable. To secure attention to this request, she gave the policeman a bank note, and named the location of the stable. She then said to the coachman, who was engaged in brushing the dust from his clothing:

"Thomas, you may come to me at nine o'clock to-morrow morning—without the carriage."

As the coachman staggered off, the lady turned to Edith, thanked her for the service she had performed, and gave her a card bearing a name and address—"Mrs. I. G. Stewart, Copley Square Hotel, Boston, Mass."

At the solicitation of the lady, Edith gave her name, and stated that she was the companion to Mrs. Gerald Goddard, of Commonwealth avenue.

This information caused Mrs. Stewart to turn pale, and otherwise manifest a strange agitation. She quickly recovered, however, and stated:

"Ah! I was introduced to Mrs. Goddard's brother, Monsieur Correlli, a few evenings ago, but I have never had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Goddard. Now it is time for me to go, and I shall have to take an electric car to get back to my hotel. Again let me thank you for your timely service. I hope you and I will meet again some time; and, dear, if you should ever need a friend, do not fail to come to me. Good-afternoon."

Shortly after the departure of Mrs. Stewart, as Edith was walking homeward, she was overtaken by Emil Correlli, who begged permission to attend her, as they were both bound for the same destination. It would have been rude to refuse, so Edith consented, although she would have preferred to go alone.

They had not advanced far before Edith became aware that they were followed by a woman, who kept parallel with them, on the opposite side of the street. Monsieur Correlli seemed unconscious of this fact, as he was apparently engrossed in the effort to entertain his companion with animated conversation. When they were within a few yards of Mrs. Goddard's residence, the woman suddenly darted across the avenue and placed herself directly in their path.

In an instant Emil Correlli seemed turned to stone, so motionless and rigid did he become. For a full minute his gaze was riveted upon the stranger, as if in horrible fascination.

"*Giulia!*" he breathed, at last, in a scarcely audible voice. "*Le diable!*"

The woman had a veil over her face, but Edith could see that she was very handsome, with a warm, Southern kind of beauty, although it was of a rather coarse type. She was evidently a foreigner, with brilliant black eyes, an olive complexion, scarlet lips and cheeks, and a wealth of purple-black hair, which was coiled in a massive knot at the back of her head.

She was of medium height, with a plump but exquisitely proportioned figure, as was revealed by her closely-fitting garment of navy-blue velvet.

The moment Emil Correlli spoke her name, she burst passionately forth, and began to address him in rapidly uttered sentences of some foreign language, which Edith could not understand.

It was not French, for she could converse in that tongue, and she knew it was not German. She therefore concluded it must be either Italian or Spanish.

As the girl talked, her eyes roved from the man's face to Edith's, with angry, jealous glances, while she gesticulated wildly with her hands, and her voice was fierce and intense with passion.

She would not give Monsieur Correlli an opportunity to say one word, until she had exhausted her seemingly endless vocabulary; but he was as colorless as a piece of his own statuary, and a lurid, desperate light burned in his eyes—a gleam, which, if she had been less intent upon venting her own passion, would have warned her that she was doing her cause, whatever it might be, more harm than good by the course she was adopting.

At last she paused in her tirade, simply because she lacked breath to go on, when Emil Correlli replied to her, in her own tongue, and with equal fluency; but in

tones that were both stern and authoritative, while it was evident that he was excessively annoyed by her sudden and unexpected appearance there.

Finally, after another attempt upon the girl's part to carry her point, he stamped his foot imperatively, to emphasize some command, and, with a look which made her cringe like a whipped cur before him; when, shooting a glance of fire and hate at Edith, she turned away, with a crestfallen air, and went, dejectedly, down the street.

Edith would have been glad, and had tried, to escape from this scene, for after the first moment of surprise upon being so unceremoniously confronted by the beautiful stranger, she had stepped aside, ascended the steps, and rang the bell.

But, for some reason, no one came to the door, and she was obliged to repeat the summons, but feeling very awkward to have to stand there and listen to the altercation that was being carried on so near her, although she could not understand a word that was said.

At last, just as Monsieur Correlli had delivered his authoritative command, the butler made his appearance, and let Edith in.

Before she could enter, the woman was gone, and Emil Correlli sprang up the steps, and was by her side.

He glanced anxiously down upon her face, which wore a grave and pre-occupied look.

He knew that she was wondering who the fiery, but beautiful and richly-dressed stranger was; knew that she could not fail to believe that there must be something suspicious and mysterious in his relations with her, and he was greatly exercised over the unfortunate encounter.

He had set his heart upon winning her—he had vowed that nothing should stand in the way of her becoming his wife, and now this—the worst of all things—had happened, to compromise him in her eyes, and he secretly breathed the fiercest anathemas upon the head of the marplot who had just left them.

Later that evening, Emil Correlli took the first opportunity to explain the unfortunate *contretemps* to the wondering Edith. He stated that the girl was the daughter of an Italian florist, who had audaciously presumed to dun him for a small bill he owed her father for floral purchases.

This matter, satisfactorily explained, as he thought, he renewed his protestations of love to Edith, solicited her hand in marriage, and was staggered by her emphatic refusal.

Her refusal was reported to Mrs. Goddard by that lady's brother, and she counseled him to be patient.

"I have in mind," she said, "the germ of a most cunning plot, which must succeed in your winning Edith Allen," and then she proceeded to unfold her plan, which, for boldness, craft, and ingenuity, would have been worthy of a French *intriguante* of the seventeenth century.

"Anna, you are a trump!" Emil Correlli exclaimed, admiringly, when she concluded. "If you can carry that out as you have planned it, it will be a most unique scheme—the best thing of its kind on record!"

"I can carry it out if you will let me do it in my own way; only you must take yourself off. I will not have you here to run the risk of spoiling everything," said Mrs. Goddard, with a determined air.

"Very well, then; I will go this very night. I will take the eleven o'clock express on the B. and A. I have such faith in your genius that I am willing to be guided wholly by you, and trust my fate entirely in your hands."

"I can write you from time to time, as the plan develops," she replied, "and send you instructions regarding the final act."

"All right, go ahead—I give you *carte blanche* for your expenses," said Monsieur Correlli, as he rose to leave the room.

Five hours later, he was fast asleep in a Pullman berth, and flying over the rails toward New York.

Meanwhile Edith, who was inclined to leave the house, and throw herself upon the kindness of Mrs. Stewart, found her mistress unusually gracious, seeking her aid in forwarding invitations for a reception, and in planning for what she called "a mid-winter frolic." She also incidentally announced, to the great gratification of Edith, that Monsieur Correlli had hurriedly departed for New York, with the intention of being absent a considerable time.

Little did Edith then suspect that she was assisting in a plan which was intended to force her into a detested marriage.



## **CHAPTER IX.**

## THE HOUSEKEEPER AT WYOMING.

The invitations for the merry-making were at length printed and forwarded to the favored guests, but the family were not to go to Wyoming for a week or so, and meantime, Mrs. Goddard devoutly hoped that the weather would change and send them a fine snowstorm, so that there would be good sleighing during their sojourn in the country.

She had her wish—everything seemed to favor the schemes of this crafty woman, for, three days later, there came a severe storm, which lasted as many more, and when at length the sun shone again there lay on the ground more than a foot of snow on a level, thus giving promise of rare enjoyment upon runners and behind spirited horses and musical bells.

At last the day of their departure arrived, and about ten o'clock, Mrs. Goddard and Edith, well wrapped in furs and robes, were driven over the well-trodden roads, in a handsome sleigh, and behind a pair of fine horses, toward Middlesex Falls.

It was only about an hour's drive, and upon their arrival they found the Goddards' beautiful country residence in fine order, with blazing fires in several of the rooms.

The housekeeper, Mrs. Weld, had attended to all the details of preparation, and was complimented by both Mr. and Mrs. Goddard. In appearance the housekeeper was very peculiar, very tall and very stout, and in no way graceful in form or feature. Mrs. Goddard voted her as "a perfect fright," with her eyes concealed behind large, dark-blue glasses. She had been employed through the agent of an intelligence office, and had come highly recommended. A close observer would have noted many oddities about her; and Edith, coming suddenly upon her in her own apartment, had reason to suspect that the housekeeper was not what she seemed—in fact, that she was disguised.

Noiselessly Mrs. Weld went about her duties, her footfalls dropping as quietly as the snow. On one occasion, arriving unexpectedly within hearing of her master and mistress, she heard him entreating her to give him possession of a certain document. This Mrs. Goddard refused until he had performed some act which, as it was apparent from the conversation, she had long been urging upon him as a

duty.

Fearing discovery, Mrs. Weld did not wait to hear more, but silently walked away.

A few busy days succeeded, and then the guests began to arrive at Wyoming. The housekeeper seemed to take a great fancy to Edith, and the latter cheerfully assisted her in many ways. Various amusements were planned for the guests. The weather was cold, but fine; the sleighing continued to be excellent, and the gay company at Wyoming kept up their exciting round of pleasure both day and night.

A theatrical performance, planned by Mrs. Goddard, was one of the amusements arranged for the entertainment of the guests. On the afternoon of the day set for the presentation of the little dramatic episode, a great packing case arrived from the city, and was taken directly to madam's rooms.

A few minutes later, Edith was requested to go to her, and, upon presenting herself at the door of her boudoir, was drawn mysteriously inside, and the door locked.

"Come," said madam, with a curious smile, as she led the way into the chamber beyond, "I want you to assist me in unpacking something."

"Certainly, I shall be very glad to help you," the young girl replied, with cheerful acquiescence.

"It is one of the costumes that is to be worn this evening, and must be handled very carefully," Mrs. Goddard explained.

As she spoke, she cut the cords binding the great box, and, lifting the cover, revealed some articles enveloped in quantities of white tissue paper.

"Take it out!" commanded madam, indicating the upper package.

Edith obeyed, and, upon removing the spotless wrappings, a beautiful skirt of white satin, richly trimmed with lace of an exquisite pattern, was revealed.

"Oh, how lovely!" exclaimed the young girl, as shaking it carefully out, she laid the dainty robe upon the bed.

Next came the waist, or corsage, which was also a marvel of artistic taste and beauty.



This was laid against the skirt when the costume, thus complete, was a perfect delight to the eye.

"It looks like a bride's dress," Edith observed, as she gazed, admiringly, upon it.

"You are right! It is for the bride who figures in our play to-night," said madam. "This must be the veil, I think," she concluded, lifting a large box from the case, and passing it to her companion.

Edith removed the cover, and uttered an involuntary cry of delight, for before her there lay a great mass of finest tulle, made up into a bridal veil, and surmounted by a coronet of white waxen orange-blossoms.

An examination of two other boxes disclosed a pair of white satin boots, embroidered with pearls, and a pair of long white kid gloves.

"Everything is exquisite, and so complete," murmured Edith, as she laid them all out beside the dress, and then stood gazing in wrapt admiration upon the outfit.

"Yes, of course, the bride will be the most conspicuous figure—the cynosure of all eyes, in fact—so she would need to be as complete and perfect as possible," Mrs. Goddard explained, but watching the girl, warily, out of the corners of her eyes.

"Who is going to wear it?" Edith inquired, as she caressingly straightened out a spray of orange blossoms that had caught in a mesh of the lace.

Madam's eyes gleamed strangely at the question.

"Miss Kerby takes the part of the heroine of the play," she answered, "whom, by the way, I called Edith, because I like the name so much. I did not think you would mind."

"Oh, no," said the girl, absently. Then, with a little start, she exclaimed, as she lifted something from the box from which the gloves had been taken: "But what is this?"

It was a small half-circle of fine white gauze, edged with a fringe of frosted silver, while a tiny chain of the same material was attached to each end.

"Oh! that is the mask," said Mrs. Goddard.

"The mask?" repeated Edith, surprised.

"Yes; I don't wonder you look astonished, to find such a thing among the outfit of a bride," said madam, with a peculiar little laugh; "but although it is a profound secret to everybody outside the actors, I will explain it to you, as the time is so near. You understand this is a play that I have myself written."

"Yes."

"Well, I have entitled it 'The Masked Bridal,' and it is a very cunningly devised plot, on the part of a pair of lovers whose obdurate parents refuse to allow them to marry," Madam explained. "Edith Lancaster is an American girl, and Henri Bernard is a Frenchman. They have a couple of friends whose wedding is set for a certain date, and who plan to help them outwit the parents of Edith and Henri. The scene is, of course, laid in Paris, where everybody knows a marriage must be contracted in church. The friends of the two unfortunate lovers send out their cards, announcing their approaching nuptials, and also the fact that they will both be masked during the ceremony."

"How strange!" Edith murmured.

"Yes, it is both a novel and an extravagant idea," Mrs. Goddard assented; "but, of course, nobody minds that in a play—the more extravagant and unreal, the better it suits the public nowadays. Well, the parents and friends of the couple naturally object to this arrangement, but they finally carry their point. Everything is arranged, and the wedding-day arrives. Only the parents and a few friends are supposed to be present, and, at the appointed hour, the bridal party—consisting of the ushers and four bridesmaids, a maid-of-honor, and the bride, leaning upon her father's arm, proceed slowly to the altar, where they are met by the groom, best man, and clergyman. Then comes the ceremony, which seems just as real as if it were a *bona-fide* marriage, you know; and when the young couple turn to leave the church, as husband and wife, they remove their masks, and behold! the truth is revealed. There is, of course, great astonishment, and some dismay manifested on the part of the obdurate parents, who are among the invited guests; but the deed is done—it would not do to make a scene or any disturbance in church, and so they are forced to make the best of the affair, and accept the situation."

"But what becomes of the couple who planned all this for their friends?" Edith inquired.

"Oh, they were privately married half an hour earlier, and come in at a rear door just in season to follow the bridal party down the aisle, and join in the wedding-

feast at home."

"It is a very strange plot—a very peculiar conception," murmured Edith, musingly.

"Yes, it is very Frenchy, and extremely unique, and will be carried out splendidly, if nothing unforeseen occurs to mar the acting, for the amateurs I have chosen are all very good. But now I must run down to see that everything is all right for the evening, before I dress. By the way," she added, as if the thought had just occurred to her, "I would like you to put on something pretty, and come to help me in the dressing-room during the play. Have you a white dress here?"

"Yes; it is not a very modern one, but it was nice in its day," Edith replied.

"Very well; I shall not mind the cut of it, if it is only white," said madam. "Now I must run. You can ring for some one to take away this rubbish," she concluded, glancing at the boxes and papers that were strewn about the room; then she went quickly out.

Edith obeyed her, and remained until the room was once more in order, after which she went up to her own chamber to ascertain if the dress, of which she had spoken, needed anything done to it before it could be worn.

Unpacking her trunk, she drew a box from the bottom, from which she took a pretty Lansdown dress, which she had worn at the wedding of one of her friends nearly two years previous. She had nice skirts, and a pair of pretty white slippers to go with it, and although it was, as she had stated, somewhat out of date, it was really a very dainty costume.

She laid everything out upon the bed, in readiness for the evening, and then went down to her dinner, which she always took with the housekeeper before the family meal was served.

Edith found Mrs. Weld looking unusually nice—although she was always a model of neatness in her attire—in a handsome black silk, with folds of soft, creamy lace across her ample breast, while upon her head she wore a fashionable lace cap, adorned with dainty bows of white ribbon.

"Oh! how very nice you are looking," Edith exclaimed, as she entered the room. "What a lovely piece of silk your dress is made of, and your cap is very pretty."

"I do believe," she added, to herself, "that she would be quite good looking if it

were not for those horrid moles and dreadful blue glasses."

"Thank you, child," the woman responded, a queer little smile lurking about her mouth. "Of course, I had to make a special effort for such an occasion as this."

"If you would only take off your glasses, Mrs. Weld," said the young girl, as she leaned forward, trying to look into her eyes. "Couldn't you, just for this evening?"

"No, indeed, Miss Edith," hastily returned the housekeeper, her color deepening a trifle under the sallow tinge upon her cheeks. "With all the extra lights, I should be blinded."

"But you have such lovely eyes—"

"How do you know?" demanded Mrs. Weld, regarding her companion curiously.

"Partly by guess—partly by observation," said Edith, laughing. "Let me prove it," she continued, playfully, as she deftly captured the obnoxious spectacles, and then looked mischievously straight into the beautiful but startled orbs thus disclosed.

"Child! child! what are you doing?" exclaimed the woman, in a nervous tone, as she tried to get possession of her property again. "Pray, give them back to me at once."

But Edith playfully evaded her, and clasped them in her hands behind her.

"I knew it! I knew it!" she cried, in a voice of merry triumph. "They are remarkably beautiful, and no one would ever believe there was anything the matter with them. Oh! I love such eyes as yours, Mrs. Weld—they are such a delicious color—so clear, so soft, and expressive."

And Edith, inspired by a sudden impulse, leaned forward and kissed the woman on the forehead, just between the eyes which she had been so admiring.

Mrs. Weld seemed to be strangely agitated by this affectionate little act.

Tears sprang into her eyes, and her lips quivered with emotion for a moment.

Then she put out her arms and clasped the beautiful girl in a fond embrace, and softly returned her caress.

"You are a lovable little darling—every inch of you," she said, with sudden

fervor.

"What a mutual admiration society we have constituted ourselves, Mrs. Weld! But, I am sure, I am very happy to know that there is some one in the world who feels so tenderly toward me."

"No one who knew you could help it, my dear," gently returned the woman, "and I shall always remember you very tenderly, for you have been so kind and helpful to me in many ways since we have been here. I suppose the affair to-night will wind up the frolic here," she went on, thoughtfully. "You will go your way, I shall go mine, and we may never meet again; but, I shall never forget you, Miss Allen—"

"Why, Mrs. Weld! how strangely you appear to-night!" Edith involuntarily interposed. "You do not seem like yourself."

"I know it, child; but the Goddards expect to return to town to-morrow, and I may not have an opportunity to see you again alone," returned the housekeeper, with a strange smile. "I do not want you to forget me, either," she went on, drawing a little box from her pocket, "so I am going to give you a souvenir to take away with you, if you will do me the favor to accept it."

She slipped the tiny box into Edith's hand as she concluded.

More and more surprised, the fair girl opened it, and uttered a low cry of admiration as she beheld its contents. Within, on a bed of spotless cotton, there lay a gold chain of very delicate workmanship, and suspended from it, by the stem, as fresh and green, apparently, as if it had that moment been plucked from its native soil, was a shamrock, in the heart of which there gleamed a small diamond of purest water.

"Why, Mrs. Weld, how beautiful!" exclaimed Edith, flushing with pleasure; "but—but—isn't the gift a little extravagant for me?"

"You are worthy of a stone ten times the size of that," said her companion, smiling; "but, if you mean to imply that I have impoverished myself to purchase it for you, do not fear; for it was a little ornament that I used to wear when I was a girl, so it costs me nothing but the pleasure of giving it to you."

"Thank you, a thousand times!" returned the happy girl, with starting tears, "and I shall prize it all the more for that very reason. Now, pray pardon me," she added, flushing, as she returned the glasses she had so playfully captured, "I am

afraid I was a little rude to remove them without your permission."

"Never mind, dear; you have done no harm," said the housekeeper, as she restored them to their place. "Come, now, we must have our dinner, or I shall be late, and there must be no mistakes to-night, of all times."

When the meal was finished, Mrs. Weld hastened away to attend to her numerous duties, while Edith went slowly upstairs to dress herself for the evening.

"There is something very, very queer about Mrs. Weld," she mused. "I do not believe she is what she appears at all. She has come into this house for some mysterious purpose—as mysterious, I believe, as the people who have employed her."



# **CHAPTER X.**

## **"THE GIRL IS DOOMED!—SHE HAS SEALED HER OWN FATE!"**

Edith looked very lovely when her toilet for the evening was completed.

We have never seen her in any but very ordinary costumes, for she had worn mourning for her dear ones for two years, but if she was attractive in these somber garments, symbols of her sorrows, she was a hundred-fold more so in the spotless and dainty dress which was almost the only souvenir that she possessed of those happy, beautiful days when she had lived in a Fifth avenue palace, and was the petted darling of fortune.

There was not a single ornament about her, excepting the pretty chain and diamond-hearted shamrock which Mrs. Weld had that evening given to her, and which she had involuntarily kissed before clasping it about her neck.

Mrs. Goddard had commissioned her to superintend the dressing-rooms, to see that the maids provided everything needful for the comfort of her guests and to look in upon them occasionally and ascertain if they were attending to their duties, until everybody had arrived; after which she was to come to her behind the scenes in the carriage-house.

Thus, after her toilet was completed, she descended to the second floor, to see that these orders were carried out.

In the ladies' dressing-rooms, she found everything in the nicest possible order, and then passed on to those allotted to the gentlemen, in one of which she found that the maids had neglected to provide drinking water.

She was upon the point of leaving the room to have the matter attended to, when Mr. Goddard, attired in full evening dress, even to gloves, entered.

"Where is Mollie?" he inquired, but with a visible start of surprise, as he noticed Edith's exceeding loveliness.

"I think she is in one of the other rooms," she replied. "Shall I call her for you?"

"Yes, if you please; or—" with a lingering glance of admiration—"perhaps you will help me with these gloves. I find it troublesome to button them."



"Certainly," replied the young girl, but flushing beneath his look, and, taking the silver button-hook from him, she proceeded to perform the simple service for him, but noticed, while doing so, the taint of liquor on his breath.

"Thank you," he said, appreciatively, when the last button was fastened. Then bending lower to look into her eyes, he added, softly: "How lovely you are to-night, Miss Edith!"

She drew herself away from him, with an air of offended dignity, and would have passed from the room had he not placed himself directly in her way, thus cutting off her escape.

"Nay, nay, pretty one; do not be so shy of me," he went on, insinuatingly. "Why have you avoided me of late? We have not had one of our cozy social chats for a long time. Did madam's unreasonable fit of jealousy that day in the library frighten you? Pray, do not mind her—she has always been like that ever since—well, for many years."

"Mr. Goddard! I beg you will cease. I cannot listen to you!" cried Edith. "Let me pass, if you please. I have an order to give one of the housemaids."

"Tut! tut! little one; the order can wait, and it is not kind of you to fly at me like that. I have been drawn toward you ever since you came into the family, and every day only serves to strengthen the spell that you have been weaving about me. Come now, tell me that you will try to return my fondness for you—"

"Mr. Goddard! what is the meaning of this strange language? You have no right to address me thus; it is an insult to me—a wicked wrong against your wife—"

"My wife!" the man burst forth, mockingly, and with a strangely bitter laugh.

A frown contracted his brow, and his lips were compressed into a vindictive line, as he again bent toward the fair girl.

"I do not love her," he said, hoarsely; "she has killed all my affection for her by her infernally variable moods, her jealousy, her vanity, and her inordinate passion for worldly pleasure, to the exclusion of all home responsibilities. Moreover—"

"I must not listen to you! Oh! let me go!" cried Edith, in a voice of distress.

Before Edith was aware of his intention, he bent his lips close to her face, and

whispered something, in swift sentences, that made her shrink from him with a sudden cry of mingled pain and dismay, and cover her ears with her pretty hands.

"I do not believe it!" she panted; "oh! I cannot believe it. I am sure you do not know what you are saying, Mr. Goddard."

Her words appeared to arouse him to a sense of the fact that he was compromising himself most miserably in her estimation.

"No, I don't suppose you can," he muttered, a half-dazed expression on his face; "and I've no business to be telling you any such things. But, all the same, I am very fond of you, pretty one, and I do not believe this is any place for you. You are too fair and sweet to serve a woman with such a disposition as madam possesses, and I wish you would leave her when we go back to the city. I know you are poor, and have no friends upon whom you can depend; but I would settle a comfortable annuity upon you, so that you could be independent, and make a pretty little home for your—"

"How dare you talk to me like this? Do you think I have no pride—no self-respect?" Edith demanded, as she haughtily threw back her proud head and confronted the man with blazing eyes.

Her act and the flash of the diamond attracted his attention to the little chain and shamrock upon her breast.

The sight seemed to paralyze him for a moment, for he stood like one turned to marble.

"Where did you get it?" he at last demanded, in a scarcely audible voice, as he pointed a trembling finger at the jewel. "Tell me!—tell me! how came you by it?"

Edith regarded him with astonishment.

Involuntarily she put up her hand and covered the ornament from his gaze.

"It was given to me," she briefly replied.

"Who gave it to you?"

"A friend."

"Was it your—a relative?" cried the man, in a hoarse whisper.

"No, it was simply a friend."

"Tell me who!"

Edith thought a moment. If she should tell Mr. Goddard that the shamrock had been given to her by the housekeeper, it might subject the woman to an unpleasant interview with the master of the house, and, perhaps, place her in a very awkward position.

She resolved upon the only course left—that of refusing to reveal the name of the giver.

"All that I can tell you, Mr. Goddard," she gravely said, at last, "is that the chain and ornament were given to me very recently by an aged friend—"

"Aged!" the man interposed, eagerly.

"Yes, by a person who must be at least sixty years of age," the young girl replied.

"Ah!" The ejaculation was one of supreme relief. "Excuse me, Miss Allen!" he continued, in a more natural manner than he had yet spoken. "I did not mean to be curious, but—a—a person whom I once knew had an ornament very similar to the one you wear—"

He was interrupted just at this point by the sound of a rich, mellow laugh that echoed down the hall like a strain of sweetest music; whereupon Gerald Goddard jumped as if some one had dealt him a heavy blow on the back.

"Good Heaven! who was that?" he cried, with livid lips.

But Edith, taking advantage of the diversion, glided swiftly from the room, telling herself that nothing could induce her to dwell with the family a single day after their return to the city, and that she would take care not to come in contact with Mr. Goddard again—at least to be alone with him—while she did remain with his wife.

The man stood motionless for a moment after her departure, as if waiting for the sound, which had so startled him, to be repeated.

But it was not, and going to the door, he peered into the hall to see who was there.

There was no one visible save the housekeeper, who just at that moment,

accosted a housemaid, to whom she appeared to be giving some directions.

"Ah! it was only one of the guests," he muttered, "but the voice was wonderfully like—like—Ugh!"

He waited a few moments longer, trying to compose his nerves, which had been sadly unstrung, both by the wine he had drunk in much larger quantities than usual, and the incidents that had just occurred, and then sought his own room, where he rang for a brandy-and-soda, and after taking it, went below to attend to his duties as host.

But neither he nor Edith dreamed that their recent interview had been observed by a third party, or had seen the white, convulsed face that had been looking in upon them, between the blinds at one of the windows, near which they had been standing.

Anna Goddard had sought her own room, directly after dinner, to make some little change in her toilet, and get her gloves, which she had left lying upon her dressing case.

As she opened the door of her boudoir she came very near giving utterance to a scream of fear upon coming face to face with a man.

The man was Emil Correlli, who had gained entrance to the apartment by climbing the vine trellis which led to the window. His secret return was in accordance with a plan previously agreed upon.

He informed his sister that he had sent a card of invitation to Mrs. Stewart of the Copley Square Hotel.

"I am glad you did," she responded; "I have long desired to meet her."

They then proceeded to discuss the important event of the evening, and Mrs. Goddard assured him that their plot was progressing admirably. Still, she manifested a twinge of remorse as she thought of the despicable trick she had devised against the fair girl whom her brother was so eager to possess.

"Anna, you must not fail me now!" he exclaimed, "or I will never forgive you! The girl must be mine, or—"

"Hush!" she interposed, holding up her finger to check him. "Did some one knock?"

"I heard nothing."

"Wait, I will see," she said, and cautiously opened the door. No one was there.

"It was only a false alarm," she murmured, glancing down the hall; then she started, as if stung, as she caught sight of two figures in the room diagonally opposite hers.

Her face grew ghastly, but her eyes blazed with a tiger-like ferocity.

She closed the door noiselessly, then with stealthy, cat-like movements, she stole toward the French door, leading out upon the veranda, throwing a long mantle over her light dress and bare shoulders. Then she passed out, and crept along the veranda toward a window of the room where her husband and Edith were talking.

She could see them distinctly through the slats of the blinds, which were movable—could see the man bending toward the graceful girl, whom she had never seen so beautiful as now, his face eager, a wistful light burning in his eyes, while his lips moved rapidly with the tale that he was pouring into her ears.

She could not hear a word, but her jealous heart imputed the very worst to him.

She could see that Edith repudiated him—that she was indignant and dismayed; but this circumstance did not soothe her in the least.

It was enough to arouse all the worst elements of her fiery nature to know that the girl's charms were alluring the man whom she worshiped, and a very demon of jealousy and hatred possessed her.

She watched them until she saw her husband give that guilty start, of which Edith took advantage to escape, and then, her hands clenched until the nails almost pierced the tender flesh, her lips convulsed—her whole face distorted with passion and pain, she turned from the spot.

"I have no longer any conscience," she hissed, as she sped swiftly back to her room. "The girl is doomed—she has sealed her own fate. As for him—if I did not love him so, I would—"

A shudder completed her sentence, but smoothing her face, she removed her wraps, and went to tell her brother that she must go below, but would have his dinner sent up immediately.

Then drawing on her gloves, she hastened down to join her guests in the drawing-room.



## **CHAPTER XI.**

## **"NOW MY VINDICATION AND TRIUMPH WILL BE COMPLETE!"**

When Anna Goddard descended to her spacious and elegant parlors, her face was wreathed with the brightest smiles, which, alas! covered and concealed the bitterness and anger of her corrupt heart, even while she circulated among her friends with apparently the greatest pleasure, and with her usual charm and grace and manner.

After a short time spent socially, the guests repaired to the spacious carriage-house, where the theatrical performance was to take place, to secure the most desirable seats for the play, before the multitude from outside should arrive.

The place had been very handsomely decorated, and lighted by electricity, for the occasion. Potted flowers, palms, and ferns were artistically grouped in the corners, and handsome draperies were hung here and there to simulate windows and doors, and to conceal whatever might otherwise have been unsightly.

The floor had been covered with something smooth, linoleum or oilcloth, and then thoroughly waxed, for after the play was over, the place was to be cleared for dancing.

Across one end, a commodious stage had been erected, although this was at present concealed by a beautiful drop-curtain of crimson felt, bordered with old gold.

The room filled rapidly, and long before the time for the curtain to ascend, every seat was occupied.

At eight o'clock, precisely, the signal was given, and the play began.

Programs had been distributed among the audience—dainty little cards of embossed white and gold they were, too—announcing the title, "The Masked Bridal," giving the names of the participants, and promising that the affair would close with a genuine surprise to every one.

The piece opened in an elegantly appointed library, with a spirited scene and dialogue between a young couple, who were desirous of marrying, and the four



objecting parents.

The actors all rendered their parts well, the heroine being especially pretty and piquant, and winning the admiration and sympathy of the audience at the outset.

In the next scene the unfortunate young couple are represented as plotting with two other lovers, whose wedding-day is set, to circumvent their obdurate parents, and carry out their determination to become husband and wife.

This also was full of energy and interest, several bright hits and witticisms being cleverly introduced, and the curtain went down amid enthusiastic applause; then, while the stage settings were being changed for the final act and the church wedding, some music was introduced, both vocal and instrumental, to while away the time.

Edith, who had assisted madam in the dressing-room as long as she was needed, had come outside, at the beginning of the scene, and stationed herself at the back of the room to watch the progress of the play.

But she had been there only for a few moments when some one touched her on the shoulder to attract her attention.

Glancing around, she saw a young girl, one of the guests in the house, who remarked:

"Mrs. Goddard wished me to tell you to come to her at once in her boudoir. Please be quick, as the matter is important."

Edith immediately glided from the room, but wondering what could have happened that madam should want her in her own apartments, when she supposed her to be behind the scenes.

Meantime, while the guests were being entertained with the play of which their hostess was the acknowledged author, a mysterious scene was being enacted within the mansion.

When the hour for the entertainment drew near, the house, as we know, had been emptied of its guests, until only the housekeeper, the butler, and the other servants remained as occupants.

The butler had been instructed to keep ward and watch below, while Mrs. Weld went upstairs, ostensibly to ascertain that everything was as it should be there,

but in reality, to carry out a project of her own.

Seeking the maids, who, since they had no duties at that particular moment to occupy them, had gathered in the dressing-rooms, and were discussing the merits of the various costumes which they had seen, she remarked, in her kindly, good-natured way:

"Girls, I am sure you would like a peep at the play, and Mrs. Goddard gave me permission to send you out, if you could be spared. I will look after everything up here, and you may go now, if you like, only be sure to hurry back the moment it is over, for you will then be needed again."

They were of course delighted with this privilege, but Mollie, who was an unusually considerate girl, and always willing to oblige others, inquired:

"Wouldn't you like to see the play, Mrs. Weld? I will stay and let you go."

"No, thank you, child. I had enough of such things years ago," the housekeeper returned, indifferently. "Run along, all of you, so as to be there when the curtain goes up."

And the girls, only too eager for the sport, needing no second bidding, sped away, thanking her heartily for the privilege.

Thus the upper portion of the mansion was entirely deserted, but for the housekeeper and the unsuspected presence of Emil Correlli, who was locked within his own room, awaiting from his sister the signal for his appearance upon the stage below.

The moment the housemaids were beyond hearing, Mrs. Weld gave utterance to a long sigh of relief, whipped off her blue spectacles, and with a swift, noise-less step, wholly unlike her usual waddling gait, hurried down the hall, and into Mrs. Goddard's room, carefully closing and locking the door after her.

Proceeding to the dressing-room, a quick, searching glance showed her the object she was looking for—my lady's jewel-casket, standing wide open upon a small, marble-top table near a full-length mirror.

It had been rifled of most of its contents, madam herself having worn many of her jewels, while others had been loaned to the actors to embellish their costumes for the play.

"Ah! my task is made much easier than I expected," murmured the woman, as she peered curiously into the velvet-lined receptacle.

She saw only an empty tray, which she carefully removed, only to find another exactly like it underneath.

This also she took out, revealing the bottom of the box, covered with its velvet cushion, upon which there were indentations, to receive a full set of jewelry, necklace, bracelets, tiara, brooch and ear-rings.

The housekeeper's face was ghastly pale, or would have been but for the stain which gave her complexion its olive tinge, and she was trembling with excitement.

"She surely took that paper from this box," she muttered, a note of disappointment in her voice, as if she had expected to find what she sought upon removing the second tray.

"I wonder if this cushion can be removed?" she continued, as she tried to lift it from its place.

But it fitted so closely that she could not stir it.

Looking around the room for something to assist her in this effort, she espied a pair of scissors on the dressing-case.

Seizing them, she attempted to pry up the cushion with them.

It was not an easy thing to do, without defacing the velvet, but, at length, she succeeded in lifting one side, when she found no difficulty in removing the whole thing.

Her agitation increased as her glance fell upon several papers snugly packed in the bottom of the box.

"Ah! if it should prove to be something of no account to me!" she breathed, with trembling lips.

At last she straightened herself with sudden resolution, and putting her hand into the box drew forth the uppermost paper.

It was yellow with time, and so brittle that it cracked apart in one of the creases as she opened it; but paying no heed to this, she stepped to the dressing-case, and

spread it out before her, while her eager eyes swept the mystic page from top to bottom.

Then a cry that ended in a great sob burst from her hueless lips.

"It is! it is!" she gasped, in voiceless agitation. "Ah, Heaven, thou art gracious to me at last! Now, I know why she would not surrender it to him—now I know what the condition of its ransom must have been!

"How long has she had it, I wonder? and when did she first learn of its existence?" she murmured. "Ah! but it does not matter—I have it at last—I, who dared not hope for its existence, believing it must have been destroyed, until the other day; and now"—throwing back her head with an air that was very expressive—"my vindication and triumph will be complete!"

With the greatest care, she refolded the paper, after which she impulsively pressed it to her lips; then, putting it away in her pocket, she turned back to the jewel-casket, and peered curiously into it once more.

"I wonder what other intrigues she has been guilty of?" she muttered, regarding its contents with a frown.

She laid her hand upon one of the papers, as if to remove it, then drew back.

"No," she said, "I will touch nothing else; I have what I came to seek, and have no right to meddle with what does not concern me. Let her keep her other vile secrets to herself; my victory is already complete."

She replaced the velvet cushion, pressing it hard down into its place.

She then restored the trays as she had found them, but did not close the casket, since she had found it open.

She retraced her steps into the boudoir, where, as she was passing out, she trod upon something that attracted her attention.

She stooped to ascertain what it was, and discovered a gentleman's glove.

"Ah," she said, as she picked it up and examined it, "I should say it belongs to madam's brother! In that case, he must have returned this evening to attend the grand finale, although I am sure he was not at the dinner-table."

She dropped the glove upon the floor where she had found it, but there was a

look of perplexity upon her face as she did so.

"It seems a little strange," she mused, "that the young man should have been away all this time; and if he was to return at all, I cannot understand why there should have been this air of secrecy about it. He has evidently been in this room to-night, but I am sure he has not been seen about the house."

She opened the door and passed out into the hall, when she was startled to hear the voice of Mrs. Goddard talking, in the hall below, with the butler.

Mrs. Weld quietly slipped across to the room opposite—the same one in which Edith and Mr. Goddard had held their interview earlier in the evening—where, seating herself under a light, she caught up a book from the table, and pretended to be deeply absorbed in its contents.

A moment later, madam, having ascended the stairs, came hurrying down the hall, and saw her there.

She started.

It would never do for the woman to suspect the truth regarding what she was about to do.

No one must dream that Edith was not lending herself willingly to the last scene in the drama of the evening, and she expected to have some difficulty in persuading her to take the part.

There must be no possibility of any one hearing any objections that she might make, for, in that case, the charge of fraud could be brought and proved against her and her brother, after all was over.

But after the first flash of dismay, the cunning woman devised a scheme which would take the housekeeper out of her way, and leave the field clear for her operations.



## **CHAPTER XII.**

## THE MASKED BRIDAL.

"Oh, Mrs. Weld!" Mrs. Goddard exclaimed, in tones of well-assumed eagerness. "I am so glad you are here! I fear I have taken cold and am going to have a chill; will you be so good as to go down and mix me a hot lemonade and send it out behind the stage to me? for I must go back directly, and I will drink it there."

The housekeeper arose at once and went out into the hall, where she saw that madam appeared excited and trembling, while her face was very pale, although her eyes were unusually bright.

Somehow, she did not believe her to be ill; but she cheerfully acceded to her request, and went directly below to attend to her commission.

As she passed down the back stairs, Edith came hurrying up the front way.

"What has happened?" she inquired, as she observed madam's unusual excitement.

"The most unfortunate thing that could occur," she nervously replied. "Miss Kerby and her brother, who had the leading parts in the play, have just been summoned home, by telegraph, on account of sickness in the family, and that leaves us without our hero and heroine."

"That is unfortunate, surely; the play will have to be given up, I suppose?" Edith remarked.

"No, indeed! I should die of mortification!" cried madam, with well-assumed consternation.

"But what can you do?" innocently inquired the young girl.

"The only thing to be done is to supply their places with others," was the ready answer. "I have a gentleman friend who will take Mr. Kerby's place, and I want you, Edith, to assume the part of the bride; you are just about the size of Alice Kerby, and the costume will fit you to perfection."

"But I am afraid I cannot—I never took part in a play in my life," objected Edith, who instinctively shrank from becoming so conspicuous before such a multitude

of people.

"Nonsense! there is but very little for you to do," said madam, "you have simply to walk into the church, upon the arm of the supposed bride's father. You will be masked, and no one will see your face until after all is over, and you have not a word to say, except to repeat the marriage service after the clergyman."

Edith shivered, and her face had grown very pale. She did not like the idea at all; it was exceedingly repugnant to her.

"I wish you could find some one else," she said, appealingly.

"There is no time," said madam.

"Oh! but it seems almost like sacrilege to me, to stand before such an audience and repeat words so solemn and significant, when they will mean nothing, when the whole thing will be but a farce," Edith tremulously remarked.

A strange expression swept over madam's face at this objection.

"You are absurdly conscientious, Edith," she coldly observed. "There is not another girl in the house upon whom I can call—they are all too large or too small, and the bridal costume would not fit one of them. Pray, pray, Miss Allen, pocket your scruples, for once, and help me out of this terrible predicament—the whole affair will be ruined by this awkward *contretemps* if you do not, and I, who have promised so much to my friends, shall become the laughing-stock of every one present."

Still the fair girl hesitated.

Some unaccountable influence seemed to be holding her back, and yet she felt that it would be very ungenerous, very disobliging of her, to allow Mrs. Goddard to be so humiliated before her hundreds of guests, when this apparently slight concession upon her part would smooth everything over so nicely.

"Oh, Edith! say you will!" cried the woman, appealingly. "You must!" she added, imperatively. "Come to my room—the costume is there all ready, and we will soon have you dressed."

She threw her arm around the girl's slender waist and almost compelled her to accompany her.

The moment they were within Mrs. Goddard's chamber, the woman nervously



began to unfasten the young girl's dress, but her fingers trembled so with excitement, showing how wrought up she was, that Edith yielded without further demur, and assisted in removing her clothing.

"That is good of you, dear," said madam, smiling upon her, "for we must work very rapidly while the scenery is being changed—we have just fifteen minutes"—glancing at the clock. "How fortunate it is that I asked you to wear white this evening!" the crafty woman remarked, as Edith's dress was removed, thus revealing her dainty underwear, "for you are all ready for the wedding costume without any other change. Here, dear, just help me, please, with this skirt, for the train is so long it needs to be handled with care."

She lifted the beautiful satin skirt from the bed as she spoke, and together they carefully slipped it over the young girl's head.

The next moment it was fastened about her waist, and the lustrous material fell around her slender form in graceful and artistic folds.

The corsage was then put on and—wonderful to relate—it fitted her to perfection.

"How strange! one would almost think it was made for me!" she remarked, all unsuspecting that her measure had been accurately taken from a dress that had been left in the city.

"Ha! ha!" laughed madam, in musical exultation, "I should say that it was a very fortunate coincidence, and it shows that I made a wise choice when I selected you to take Miss Kerby's place. I did not know who else to call upon—of course I could not go out into the audience to find some one, and thus betray my predicament to everybody; neither could I take one of the housemaids, because she would have been sure to blunder and be so awkward. Oh! isn't this dress just lovely?"

Thus madam chattered, while she worked, wholly unlike herself, nervous, anxious, and covertly watching every expression of Edith's sensitive face.

But the girl did not have the slightest suspicion that she was being tricked.

The emergency of the moment appeared sufficient to tax the nerves of any one to the utmost, and she attributed everything to that.

"It certainly is a very rich and elegant costume," Edith gravely responded to the

woman's query. "It seems to me to be far too nice and elaborate for the occasion."

Mrs. Goddard reddened slightly, and shot a quick, searching look at the girl's face.

"Well, of course it had to be nice to correspond with everything else," she explained, "for all the other young ladies are to wear their ball costumes, which are very elegant, and since the bride is to be the most conspicuous of all, it would not do to have her less richly attired. There!"—as she fastened a beautiful cluster of orange-blossoms to the corsage and stepped back to study the effect—"aren't you just lovely in it?"

"Now the veil," she continued, catching it up from the bed. "Oh!"—with an expression of dismay—"we have forgotten the boots, and you must not sit down to crush the dress. Here, support yourself upon this chair, hold out your foot, and I will put them on for you."

And the haughty woman went down upon her knees and performed the menial service, regardless, in her excitement, of her own elegant costume, which was being crushed in the act.

Then the veil was adjusted, madam chatting all the while to keep the girl's attention, and Edith, catching a glimpse of her reflection in the glass and under the influence of her companion's magnetism and enthusiasm, began to be imbued with something of the spirit of the occasion and to enjoy seeing herself adorned with these beautiful garments, which so enhanced her beauty.

When everything was done, madam stood back to look at her work, and uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Oh! you are simply perfect, Edith!" she said. "You are just too lovely for anything! Miss Kerby would not have made nearly so beautiful a bride, and—and—I could almost wish that you were really going to be married."

"Oh, no!" cried the fair girl, shrinking back from the strange gleam that shone from the woman's eyes, as she made this remark, while her thoughts flew, with the speed of light and with a yearning so intense that it turned her white as snow, to Royal Bryant, the man to whom, all unasked, she had given her heart.

Then, as if some instinct had accused her of unmaidenly presumption, a flush, that was like the rosy dawn upon the eastern sky, suffused her fair face, neck,

and bosom.

"Ha! ha! not if you could marry the man of your choice?" queried madam, with a gleam of malice in her dark eyes and a strange note of triumph in her silvery laugh that again caused her companion to regard her curiously.

"Oh! please do not jest about it in this light way—marriage is too sacred to be treated with levity," said Edith, in a tremulous tone. "But where is the mask?" she added, glancing anxiously toward the bed. "You know you said the face of the bride was not to be seen."

"Here it is," responded madam, snatching the dainty thing from the bed. "See! it goes on under the veil, like this"—and she dextrously slipped the silver-fringed piece of gauze beneath the edge of the veil and fastened the chain under the orange-wreath behind.

The fringe fell just to Edith's chin, thus effectually concealing her features, while it was not thick enough to prevent her seeing, distinctly, everything about her.

A few other details were attended to, and then Mrs. Goddard hurriedly said:

"Come, now, we must hasten," and she gathered up the voluminous train and laid it carefully over Edith's arm. "We shall have to go the back way, through the billiard-room, because no one must see you until you appear upon the stage."

The carriage-house adjoined the mansion, and was connected with it by a door, at the end of a hall, that opened into a large room over it which had been devoted to billiards.

In the rear of this there was a stairway, which led down to the first floor and behind the stage; thus Madam and Edith were enabled to reach the dressing-room without being seen by any one, and just as the orchestra were playing the closing bars of the last selection before the raising of the curtain.

Here they found a tall, elderly gentleman, in full evening dress, who was to represent the supposed bride's father in giving his child away to the groom.

All the other actors were already grouped upon the stage or in their respective places behind the scenes awaiting the coming of the bride.

Outside, the audience were all upon the *qui vive*, for, not only was the closing act of the very clever play looked forward to with much interest, for its own sake,

but the genuine surprise promised them was a matter for much curious conjecture and eager anticipation.

As Edith stepped upon the stage, leaning upon the arm of her escort, the bridesmaids and maid of honor filed into place before them from the wings, and all were ready for the *grand finale* just as the signal was given for the curtain to go up.

A shiver ran over Edith, shaking her from head to foot as that sharp, incisive sound from the silver bell went ringing through the room.

For, as she had stepped upon the stage and Mrs. Goddard laid her hand upon the arm of the elderly gentleman, she had observed the two exchange meaning smiles, while the maids and ushers, as they had filed into place, had regarded her with marked and admiring curiosity.

The curtain was raised, revealing to the appreciative audience the interior of a beautiful little church.

It was perfect and complete in all its appointments, even to the stained glass windows, the altar, the chancel, the organ, and the exquisite floral decorations suitable for a wedding ceremony.

Simultaneously with this revelation there broke upon the ear and the breathless hush that prevailed throughout the rooms the sound of an organ playing the customary wedding-march.

Presently, at the rear of the church, a door opened, and four ushers entered, "with stately tread and slow," followed by as many bridesmaids, dressed in exquisite costumes.

Then came the maid of honor, clad in pale-blue satin, and carrying a huge bunch of pink roses that contrasted beautifully with her dainty toilet.

Next, the veiled and masked bride appeared, leaning upon the arm of her attendant and clasping a costly bouquet of white orchids, which Mrs. Goddard had produced from some mysterious source, and thrust into her hands at the last moment.

A thrill of awe, mingled with intensest curiosity, pervaded the audience as the graceful figure of the beautiful girl came slowly into view.

The whole affair was so vividly real and impressive that every one watched the scene with breathless interest.

And now, at one side of the chancel, another door was seen to open, when a spotlessly-gowned clergyman, followed by the groom and best man, entered and proceeded slowly toward the altar.

The two men behind the minister were in full evening dress, the only peculiar thing noticeable being the mask of black gauze edged with silver fringe which the groom wore over his face.

They reached the altar at the same moment that the rest of the bridal party paused before it.

Then, as the clergyman turned his face toward the audience and the light from the chandelier above him fell full upon him, a flutter of excitement ran throughout the room, while many persons were seen to exchange glances of undisguised astonishment, for they had recognized a popular young divine—the pastor of a church, which many of those present, together with their hostess, were in the habit of attending.

What could it mean?

Surely, no ordained minister who respected himself and revered his calling would lend himself to a sensational farce, such as they had witnessed that evening—at least, to carry it to such an extent as to read, in mockery, the service of the sacred ordinance of marriage over a couple of giddy actors!

There was a nervous, fluttering of programs, a restless movement among the fashionable throng, which betrayed that, however much they might be given to pleasure and levity in certain directions, they could not quite countenance this perversion of a divine institution as a matter of amusement.

The manner and bearing of the man, however, was most reverential and decorous, and, as he opened and began to read from the elegant prayer-book which he carried in his hands, a breathless hush again settled upon every person in the room.

For, like a flash, it had seemed to burst upon every mind that there was to be a *bona fide* marriage—that this was to be the "Genuine Surprise" that had been promised them!



## **CHAPTER XIII.**

## **THE DASTARDLY PLOT IS REVEALED.**

Every thought and feeling was now merged in intense interest and curiosity regarding the participants in the strange union, which was being consummated before them. Who was the beautiful bride, so perfect in form, so graceful in bearing, so elegantly and richly adorned?

Who the strange groom?

The parts of the plotting lovers of the play had hitherto been taken by the brother and sister—Walter and Alice Kerby, who were well-known in society.

But of course every one reasoned that they could not both officiate as principals in the scene now being enacted before them.

The figure and bearing of that veiled bride upon the stage were similar to that of Miss Kerby; but that young lady was known to be engaged to a young lawyer who was now seated with the audience; therefore, no one, who knew her, believed for a moment that she could be personating the masked bride now standing before the altar, while the groom beside her was neither so stout nor as tall as Walter Kerby.

The ceremony proceeded, according to the Episcopal form, although the young minister was known to be a Universalist, and when he reached the charge, calling for any one "who could show just cause why the two before him should not be joined in lawful wedlock, to speak or forever hold his peace," those sitting nearest the stage were startled to see the bride shiver, from head to foot, while a deadly pallor seemed to settle over that portion of her face that was visible, and to even extend over her neck.

The service went on without any interruption, the groom making the responses in clear, unfaltering tones, although those of his companion were scarcely audible. When the symbol of their union was called for, it was also noticed that Edith shrank from having the ring placed upon her finger, but it was only a momentary hesitation, and the service was soon completed with all due solemnity.

After the blessing, when the couple arose from their knees, the maid of honor



stepped forward, and, lifting the mask of the bride, adjusted it above her forehead with the jeweled pin, while the audience sat spell-bound, awaiting with breathless suspense the revelation that would ensue.

At the same moment the groom also removed the covering from his face, when those who could see him instantly recognized him as Emil Correlli, the handsome and wealthy brother of the hostess of the evening.

His countenance was white to ghastliness, betraying that he was laboring under great excitement and mental strain.

But the fair young bride! who was she?

Not one in that great company recognized her for the moment, for scarcely any one had ever seen her before—excepting those, of course, who had been guests in the house during the week, and these failed to identify her in the exquisite costume which was so different from the simple black dresses which she had always worn, and enveloped, as she was, in that voluminous, mist-like veil.

The clergyman omitted nothing, and immediately, upon the lifting of the masks, greeted and congratulated the young couple with every appearance of cordiality and sincerity.

To poor, reluctant Edith the whole affair had been utterly distasteful and repulsive.

Indeed, she had felt as if she was almost guilty of a crime in allowing herself to participate lightly in anything of so sacred a nature, and, throughout the entire ceremony, she had shivered and trembled with mingled nervousness and repugnance.

When the ring—an unusually massive circlet of gold—had been slipped upon her finger, she had involuntarily tried to withdraw her hand from the clasp of the man who was holding it, a sensation of deadly faintness almost overpowering her for the moment.

But feeling that she must not fail madam and spoil everything at this last moment, she braced herself to go on with the farce (?) to the end.

She was so relieved when it was ended, so eager to get away from the place and have the dread ordeal over, that she scarcely heard a word the clergyman uttered while congratulating her. She was dimly conscious of the clasp of his hand and

the sound of his voice, but did not even notice the hated name by which he addressed her.

Neither had she once glanced at the groom, though as he took her hand and laid it upon his arm, when they turned to go out, she wondered vaguely why he should continue to hold it clasped in his, and what made his clinging fingers tremble so.

But Emil Correlli, now that his scheme was accomplished, led her, with an air of mingled triumph and joy which sat well upon him, directly out to the ladies' dressing-room, where they found madam alone awaiting them.

She could not have been whiter if she had been dead, and her teeth were actually chattering with nervousness as the two came toward her, Edith still with bowed head and downcast eyes—her brother beaming with the exultation he could not conceal.

But she braced herself to meet them with a brave front.

"Dear child, you went through it beautifully," she said, in a caressing voice as she took Edith into her arms and kissed her upon the forehead. "Let me thank and congratulate you—and you also, Emil."

At the sound of this name, Edith uttered a cry of dismay and turned her glance, for the first time, upon the man at her side.

"You!" she gasped, starting away from him with a gesture of horror, and marble could not have been whiter, nor a statue more frozen than she for a moment after making this amazing discovery.

"Hush!" imperatively exclaimed Mrs. Goddard, who quickly arose to the emergency. "Do not make a scene. It could not be helped—some one had to take Mr. Kerby's place, and Emil, arriving at the last moment, was pressed into the service the same as yourself."

"How could you? It was cruel! it was wicked! I never would have consented had I suspected," cried the girl, in a voice resonant with indignation.

"Hush!" again commanded madam, "you must not—you shall not spoil everything now. The actors are all to hold an informal reception in the parlors while this room is being cleared for dancing, and you two must take your places with them—"

"I will not! I will not lend myself to such a wretched farce for another moment!" Edith exclaimed, and never for an instant suspecting that it was anything but a farce.

The face of Mrs. Goddard was a study, as was also her brother's, as these resolute words fell upon her ears; but she had no intention of undeceiving the girl at present, for she knew that if she threw up the character which she had thus far been impersonating, their plot would be ruined and a fearful scandal follow.

If they could only trick her into standing with the others to receive the congratulations of her guests—to be publicly addressed as, and appear to assent to the name of, Mrs. Correlli, she believed it would be comparatively easy later on to convince her of the truth and compel her to yield to the inevitable.

But she saw that Edith was thoroughly aroused—that she felt she had been badly used—that she had been shamefully imposed upon by having been cheated into figuring thus before hundreds of people with a man who was obnoxious to her.

Madam was at her wits' end, for the girl's resolute air and blazing eyes plainly indicated that she did not intend to be trifled with any longer.

She shot a glance of dismay at her brother, only to see a dark frown upon his brow, while he angrily gnawed his under lip.

She feared that, with his customary impulse, he might be contemplating revealing the truth, and such a course she well knew would result in a scene that would ruin the evening for everybody.

But just at this instant the bridesmaids came trooping into the room and created a blessed diversion.

"Here we are, dear Mrs. Goddard," a gay girl exclaimed. "Didn't it all go off beautifully, and isn't it time we were in our places for the reception?"

"Yes, yes; run along, all of you. Lead the way, Nellie, please—you know how to go up through the billiard-room," said Mrs. Goddard, nervously, as she gently pushed the girl toward the stairway. Then bending toward Edith, she whispered, imploringly:

"I beg, I entreat you, Edith, not to spoil everything—everybody will wonder why you are not with the others, and I cannot explain why you refused to stand with my brother. Go! go! you must not keep my guests waiting. Emil, take her," and

with an imperative gesture to her brother, she swept on toward the stairway after the others to arrange them effectively in the drawing-room.

Emil Correlli shot a searching look into the face of the girl beside him.

It was cold and proud, the beautiful eyes still glowing with indignation. But resolving upon a bold move, he reached down, took her hand, and laid it upon his arm.

"Pardon me just this once," he said, humbly, "and let me add my entreaties to my sister's," and he tried gently to force her toward the stairway.

Edith drew herself up and took her hand from his arm.

"Go on," she said, haughtily, "and I will follow. Since I have been tricked into this affair so far, a little more of the same folly cannot matter, and rather than subject Mrs. Goddard to a public mortification, I will yield the point."

She made a gesture for him to proceed, and he turned to obey, a gleam of triumph leaping into his eyes at her concession.

Without a word they swiftly made their way back into the house and down to the elegant parlors where, at the upper end, the first object to greet their eyes was a beautiful floral arch with an exquisite marriage bell suspended from it.

On either side of this the bridesmaids and ushers had taken their places, and into the center of it Emil Correlli now led his companion.

And now ensued the last and most fiendish act in the dastardly plot.

Hardly were they in their places when the guests came pouring into the room, and the ushers began their duties of presentation, while Edith, with a sinking heart, but growing every moment more indignant and disgusted with what appeared to her only a horrible and senseless mockery, was obliged to respond to hundreds of congratulations and bear in silence being addressed as Mrs. Correlli.

It galled her almost beyond endurance—it was torture beyond description to her proud and sensitive spirit to be thus associated with one for whom she had no respect, and who had made himself all the more obnoxious by lending himself to the deception which had just been practiced upon her.

Once, when there was a little pause, she turned haughtily upon the man at her side.

"Why am I addressed thus?" she demanded.

"Why do you allow it? Why do you not correct these people and tell them to use the name that was used in the play rather than yours?"

The man grew white about the lips at these questions.

"Perhaps they forget—I—I suppose it seems more natural to address me by my name," he faltered.

"I do not like it—I will not submit to it a moment longer," Edith indignantly returned.

"Hush! it is almost over," said her companion, in a swift whisper, as others came forward just then, and she was obliged, though rebellious and heart-sick, to submit to the ordeal.

But it was over at last, for, as the introductions were made, the guests passed back to the carriage-house, which had been cleared for dancing, and where the musicians were discoursing alluring strains in rhythmic measure.

Even the bridesmaids and ushers, tempted by the sounds, at last deserted their posts, and Emil Correlli and his victim were finally left alone, the sole occupants of the drawing-room.

"Will you come and dance?" he inquired, as he turned a pleading look upon her. "Just once, to show that you forgive me for what I have done to-night."

"No, I cannot," said Edith, coldly and wearily. "I am going directly upstairs to divest myself of this mocking finery as soon as possible."

A swift, hot flush suffused Emil Correlli's face, at these words.

"Pray do not speak so bitterly and slighly of what has made you, in my eyes at least, the most beautiful woman in this house to-night," he said, with a look of passionate yearning in his eyes.

"Flattery from you, sir, after what has occurred, is, to speak mildly, exceedingly unbecoming," Edith haughtily responded and turned proudly away from him as if about to leave the room.

But, at that moment, Mr. Goddard, who had not presented himself before, came hurriedly forward and confronted them. His face was very pale, but there was an

angry light in his eyes and a bitter sneer upon his lips.

"Well, Correlli, I am bound to confess that you have stolen a march upon us to-night, in fine style," he remarked, in a mocking tone, "and madam—Mrs. Correlli, I should say—allow me to observe that you have outshone yourself this evening, both as an actress and a beauty! Really, the surprise, the *denouement*, to which you have treated us surpasses anything in my experience; it was certainly worthy of a Dumas! Permit me to offer you my heartiest congratulations."

Edith crimsoned with anger to her brows and shot a look of scorn at the man, for his manner was bitterly insolent and his tone had been violent with wounded feeling and derision throughout his speech.

"Let this wretched farce end here and now," she said, straightening herself and lifting her flashing eyes to his face. "I am heartily sick of it, and I trust you will never again presume to address me by the name that you have just used."

"Indeed! and are you so soon weary of your new title? Not yet an hour a bride, and sick of your bargain!" retorted Gerald Goddard, with a mocking laugh.

"I am no 'bride,' as you very well know, sir," spiritedly returned Edith.

The man regarded her with a look of astonishment.

He had been very much interested in his wife's clever play, until the last act, when he had been greatly startled by the change in the leading characters, both of whom he had instantly recognized in spite of their masks. He wondered why they had been substituted for Alice and Walter Kerby; when, upon also recognizing the clergyman, it had flashed upon him that this last scene was no "play"—it was to be a *bona fide* marriage planned, no doubt, by his wife for some secret reason best known to her and the young couple.

He did not once suspect that Edith was being tricked into an unwilling union.

He had known that Emil Correlli was fond of her, but he had not supposed he would care to make her his wife, although he had no doubt the girl would gladly avail herself of such an offer. Evidently the courtship had been secretly and successfully carried on; still, he could not understand why they should have adopted this exceedingly strange way to consummate their union, when there was nothing to stand in the way of a public marriage, if they desired it.

He was bitterly wounded and chagrined upon realizing how he had been ignored

in the matter by all parties, and thus allowed to rush headlong into the piece of folly which he had committed, earlier in the evening, in connection with Edith.

Thus he had held himself aloof from the couple until every one else had left the parlors, when he mockingly saluted them as already described.

"No bride?" he repeated, skeptically.

"No, sir. I told you it was simply a farce. I was merely appealed to to take the place, in the play, of Miss Kerby, who was called home by telegram," Edith explained.

Mr. Goddard glanced from her to his brother-in-law in unfeigned perplexity.

"What are you saying?" he demanded. "Do you mean to tell me that you believe that last act was a farce?—that you do not know that you have been really and lawfully married to the man beside you?"

"Certainly I have not! What do you mean, sir, by such an unwarrantable assertion?" spiritedly retorted the young girl, but losing every atom of color, as a suspicion of the terrible truth flashed through her mind.

Gerald Goddard turned fiercely upon his brother-in-law at this, for he also now began to suspect treachery.

"What does she mean?" he cried, sternly. "Has she been led into this thing blindfolded?"

"I think it would be injudicious to make a scene here," Emil Correlli replied, in a low tone, but with white lips, as he realized that the moment which he had so dreaded had come at last.

"What do you mean? Why do you act and speak as if you believed that mockery to be a reality?" exclaimed Edith, looking from one face to the other with wildly questioning eyes.

"Edith," began Mr. Goddard, in an impressive tone, "do you not know that you are this man's wife?—that the ceremony on yonder stage was, in every essential, a legal one, and performed by the Rev. Mr. —— of the —— church in Boston?"

"No! never! I do not believe it. They never would have dared do such a dastardly deed!" panted the startled girl, in a voice of horror.

Then drawing her perfect form erect, she turned with a withering glance to the craven at her side.

"Speak!" she commanded. "Have you dared to play this miserable trick upon me?"

Emil Correlli quailed beneath the righteous indignation expressed in her flashing glance; his eyes drooped, and conscious guilt was shown in his very attitude.

"Forgive me—I loved you so," he stammered, and—she was answered.

She threw out her hands in a gesture of repudiation and horror; she flashed one withering, horrified look into his face, then, with a moan of anguish, she swayed like a reed broken by the tempest, and would have fallen to the floor in her spotless robes had not Gerald Goddard caught her senseless form in his arms, and, lifting her by main strength, he bore her from the room and upstairs to her own chamber.





## **CHAPTER XIV.**

## **"YOUR FAITHLESSNESS TURNED ME INTO A DEMON."**

Emil Correlli followed Mr. Goddard and his unconscious burden, looking like anything but a happy bridegroom.

He had expected that Edith would weep and rave upon discovering the trap into which she had been lured; but he had not expected that the revelation would smite her with such terrible force, laying her like one dead at his feet, as it had done, and he was thoroughly alarmed.

When Mr. Goddard reached the girl's room he laid her upon her bed, and then sent one of the servants for the housekeeper. But Mrs. Weld could not be found, so another maid was called, and Edith was gradually restored to consciousness.

But the moment her glance fell upon Emil Correlli, who insisted upon remaining in the room, and she realized what had occurred, she relapsed into another swoon, so deathlike and prolonged that a physician, who happened to be among the guests, was summoned from the ball-room to attend her.

He excluded every one but the maids from the room, when he ordered his patient to be undressed and put into bed, and after long and unwearied efforts, she was again revived, when she became so unnerved and hysterical that the physician, becoming alarmed, was about to give her a powerful opiate, when she sank into a third fainting fit.

Meanwhile, in the ball-room below, gayety was at its height. There had been a little stir and commotion when it was learned that Edith had fainted; but the matter was passed over with a few well-bred comments of regret, and then forgotten for the time. But as soon as she could do so without being observed, madam stole from the place and went into the house to ascertain how the girl was.

She was, of course, aware of the cause of the swoon, and, as may be readily imagined, was in no comfortable frame of mind. She was met at the head of the second flight of stairs by her husband, whose face was grave and stern.

"How is she?" madam inquired.

"In a very critical condition; Dr. Arthur says she is liable to have brain fever," he tersely replied.

"Brain fever!" exclaimed his wife, in a startled tone. "Surely, she cannot be as bad as that!"

"Woman, what have you done?" the man demanded, in a hoarse whisper. "How have you dared to plot and carry out the dastardly deed that you have perpetrated this night?"

Anna Goddard's eyes began to blaze defiance.

"That is neither the tone nor the manner you should employ in addressing me, Gerald, as you very well know," she retorted, with colorless lips.

"Have done with your tragic airs, madam," he cried, laying a heavy hand upon her arm. "I have had enough of them. I ask you again, how have you dared to commit this crime?"

"Crime?" she repeated, with a start, but flashing him a glance that made him wince as she shook herself free from his grasp. "You use a harsh term, Gerald; but if you desire a reason for what has occurred to-night, I can give you two."

"Name them," her companion curtly demanded.

"First and foremost, then—to protect myself."

"To protect yourself—from what?"

"From treachery and desertion."

"Anna!"

A bitter sneer curled the beautiful woman's lips.

"You know how to do it very well, Gerald," she tauntingly returned. "That air of injured innocence is vastly becoming to you, and would be very effective, if I did not know you so well; but it has disarmed me for the last time. Pray never assume it again, for you will never blind me by it in the future."

"Explain yourself, Anna. I fail to understand you."

"Very well; I will do so in a very few words; I was a witness of your interview with the girl just after dinner to-night."

"You?" ejaculated the man, flushing hotly, and looking considerably crestfallen. "Well, what of it?" he added, defiantly, the next moment.

"What of it, indeed? Do you imagine a wife is going to stand quietly by and see her husband make love to her companion?"

"What nonsense you are talking, Anna! I went in search of one of the housemaids to button my gloves for me, met Miss Allen instead, and she was kind enough to oblige me."

"Bah! Gerald, I was too near you at the time to swallow such a very lame vindication," vulgarly sneered his wife. "You were making love to her, I tell you—you were telling her something which you had no business to reveal, and I swore then that her fate should be sealed this very night."

Gerald Goddard realized that there was no use arguing with his wife in that mood, while he also felt that his case was rather weak, and so he shifted his ground.

"But you must have plotted this thing long ago, for your play was written, and your characters chosen before we left the city," he remarked.

"Well?"

"But you said you had two reasons; what was the other?"

"Emil's love for the girl. He became infatuated with her from the moment of his coming to us, as you must have noticed."

"Yes."

"Well, he tried to win her—he even asked her to marry him, but she refused him. Think of it—that little nobody rejecting a man like Emil, with his wealth and position!"

"Well, if she did not love him, she had a right to refuse, him."

"Oh, of course," sneered madam, irritably. "But you know what he is when he once gets his heart set upon anything, and her obstinacy only made him the more determined to carry his point. He appealed to me to help him; and, as I have never refused him anything he wanted, if I could possibly give it to him—"

"But this was such a wicked—such a heartless, cowardly thing to do!" interposed

Mr. Goddard, with a gesture of horror.

"I know it," madam retorted, with a defiant toss of her head; "but you may thank yourself for it, after all; for, almost at the last moment, I repented—I was on the point of giving the whole thing up and letting the play go on without any change of characters, when your faithlessness turned me into a demon, and doomed the girl."

"I believe you are a 'demon'—your jealousy has been the bane of your whole life and mine; and now you have ruined the future of as beautiful and pure a girl as ever walked the earth," said Gerald Goddard, with a threatening brow, and in a tone so deadly cold that the woman beside him shivered.

"Pshaw! don't be so tragic," she said, after a moment, and assuming an air of lightness, "the affair will end all right—when Edith comes fully to herself and realizes the situation, I am sure she will make up her mind to submit gracefully to the inevitable."

"She shall not—I will help her to break the tie that binds her to him."

"Will you?" mockingly questioned his wife. "How pray?"

"By claiming that she was tricked into the marriage."

"How will you prove that, Gerald?" was the smiling query.

The man was dumb. He knew he could not prove it.

"Did she not go willingly enough to the altar?" pursued madam. "Did she not repeat the responses freely and unhesitatingly? Was she not married by a regularly ordained minister? and was she not introduced afterward to hundreds of people as the wife of my brother, and did she not respond as such to the name of Mrs. Correlli? I hardly think you could make out a case, Gerald."

"But the fact that the Kerbys were called away by telegram, and that some one was needed to supply their places, would prove that Edith had no knowledge of the affair—at least until the last moment," said Mr. Goddard, eagerly seizing upon that point.

But madam broke into a musical little laugh as he ceased.

"Do you imagine that I would leave such a ragged end as that in my plot?" she mockingly questioned. "The Kerbys were not called away by telegram, and no

one can prove that either was ever told they were. The Kerbys are still here, dancing away as heartily as any one below, and they have known, from the first, that they would not appear in the last act—they and they only, were let into the secret that the play was to end with a real marriage."

"It is the most devilish plot I ever heard of," said her companion, passionately, through his tightly-locked teeth. "Your insane jealousy and suspicion, during the years we have lived together, have shriveled whatever affection I hitherto possessed for you!"

"Gerald!"

The name came hoarsely from the woman's white lips.

It was as if some one had stabbed her, and her heart had died with the utterance of that loved name.

He left her abruptly, and descended the stairs, never once looking back, while she watched him with an expression in her eyes that had something of the fire of madness in it, as well as that of a breaking heart.

When he reached the lower hall, she dashed down to the second floor, and into her own room, locking herself in.

Fifteen minutes later she came out again, but in place of the usual glow of health upon her cheeks, she had applied rouge to conceal the ghastliness she could not otherwise overcome, while there was a look of recklessness and defiance in her dark eyes that bespoke a nature driven to the verge of despair.

Making her way back to the ball-room, she was soon mingling with the merry dancers, and with a forced gayety that deceived every one save her husband.

To all inquiries for the bride, she replied that she had recovered consciousness, but it was doubtful if she would be able to make her appearance again that night.

Then as her glance fell upon a tall, magnificently-formed woman, who was standing near, and the center of an admiring group, she inquired, in a tone of surprise:

"Why! who is that lady in garnet velvet and point lace?"

"That is a Mrs. Stewart, a very wealthy woman, who resides at the Copley Square Hotel," was the reply.

"Oh, is that Mrs. Stewart?" said madam, with eager interest.

"Yes; but are you not acquainted with her?" questioned her guest, with a look of well-bred astonishment.

"No; and no wonder you think it strange that she should be here by invitation, and I have no personal acquaintance with her," the hostess remarked, with a smile; "but such is the case, nevertheless; a card was sent to her at the request of my brother, who has met her several times, and who admires her very much. What magnificent diamonds she wears!"

"Yes; she is said to be worth a great deal of money."

"She must have come in while I was upstairs inquiring about Edith," madam observed. "I must find my brother, and be presented to her. Excuse me—I will see you later."

With a graceful obeisance, madam turned away and went in search of Emil Correlli.

But, as she went, she wondered if she could ever have seen Mrs. Stewart before.

The woman's face seemed strangely familiar to her, and yet she could not remember having met her before.

The sensation was something like those mysterious occurrences which sometimes make people feel that they are but a repetition of experiences in a previous state of existence.

The stranger was an undeniably handsome woman. She was more than handsome, for there was a sweet grace and influence about her every movement and expression that proclaimed her to be a woman of noble and lovely character.

She was a woman to be singled out from the multitude on account of the taste and elegance of her costume, as well as for her great personal beauty.

"She cannot have less than fifty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds on her person," murmured Anna Goddard, with a pang of envy, as she covertly watched her strange guest while she made her way through the throng in search of her brother.

She met him near the door, he having just come in from the house, to excuse himself to his sister, after having been to Edith's door for the sixth time to

inquire for her.

His face was pale, his brow gloomy, his eyes heavy with anxiety.

"Well, how is she now?" questioned his sister.

"She has fallen into her third swoon, and the doctor thinks she is in a very critical state. He says her condition must have been induced by a tremendous shock of some kind."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Goddard, looking relieved. "Judging from that, I should say that the girl has not yet revealed the true state of affairs."

"No; Dr. Arthur did not appear to know how to account for her condition, and asked me if I knew anything that could have caused it."

"Of course, you did not?" said madam, meaningly.

"No; except the excitement, etc., of the occasion."

"Well, don't worry," Mrs. Goddard returned; "everything will come out all right in time. It is a great piece of luck that she did not wail and rave and let out the whole story before the doctor and the maids. Your Mrs. Stewart is here—you must come and greet her and introduce me," she concluded, glancing toward her guest as she spoke.

"I was coming to tell you that I am going to my room and to bed—I have no heart for any gayety to-night," said Emil Correlli, gloomily.

"Nonsense! don't be so absurdly foolish, Emil," responded his sister, impatiently.

"Indeed! I think it would be improper for me to remain when my wife is so ill," he objected, but flushing as he uttered the word.

"Well, perhaps; do as you choose. But come and introduce me to Mrs. Stewart before you go; she must feel rather awkward to be a guest here and not know her hostess."





## **CHAPTER XV.**

## "OH, GOD! I KNEW IT! YOU ARE—ISABEL!"

With a somewhat reluctant air, Emil Correlli offered his arm to his sister and led her toward the woman around whom a group of distinguished people had gathered, and whom she was entertaining with an ease and grace that proclaimed her perfectly at home among the *crème de la crème* of society.

She appeared not to perceive the approach of her hostess and her brother, but continued the animated conversation in which she was engaged.

A special observer, however, would have noticed the peculiar fire which began to burn in her beautiful eyes.

When Mr. Correlli presented his sister, she turned with fascinating grace, making a charming acknowledgment, although she did not offer her hostess her hand.

"You are very welcome, Mrs. Stewart," Mrs. Goddard remarked, in response to some words of apology for being a guest in the house without a previous acquaintance. "I only regret that we have not met before."

"Thanks; I, too, deplore the complication of circumstances which has prevented an earlier meeting," was the sweet-voiced response.

But there was a peculiar shading in the remark which, somehow, grated harshly upon Anna Goddard's ears and nerves.

"Who is she, anyhow?" she questioned within herself with a strange feeling of unrest and perplexity. "I never even heard of her until after Emil came; yet there is something about her that makes me feel as if we had met in some other sphere."

She stole a searching glance at the woman's face, only to find her great, luminous eyes fastened upon her with an equally intent gaze.

"Ah!" and with this voiceless ejaculation and a great inward start, some long dormant memory seemed suddenly to have been aroused within her.

There was an instant of awkwardness; then madam, who seldom allowed anything to disturb her self-possession, remarked:

"I am sorry, Mrs. Stewart, that you did not arrive earlier to witness our little play."

But while she was giving utterance to this polite regret, she was saying to herself:

"Yes, there certainly is a look about her that reminds me of—Ugh! She may possibly be a relative, or the resemblance may be merely a coincidence. All the same, I shall not like her any the better for recalling that horror to me."

"Thank you," Mrs. Stewart replied; "no doubt I should have enjoyed it, especially as, I am told, it was original with you and terminated in a real and very pretty wedding."

"Yes; my brother finds that he must leave the city earlier than he anticipated; and, as he was anxious to take his bride with him, he chose this opportunity to celebrate his marriage, and to introduce his wife to our friends."

"Ah! I did not even know that Monsieur Correlli was contemplating matrimony. Who is the favored lady of his choice?" Mrs. Stewart inquired.

"A Miss Edith Allen."

"Edith Allen!" repeated the beautiful stranger, with a start.

"Yes," said Mrs. Goddard, regarding her with surprise, but unmixed with anxiety. "Did you ever meet her?"

"Is she very fair and lovely, with golden hair and deep-blue eyes, a tall, slender figure, and charming manners?" eagerly questioned Mrs. Stewart.

"Yes, you have described her exactly," answered madam, yet secretly more disturbed than before; "but I am surprised that you should know her, for she has been in the city only a short time, and I did not suppose she had made a single acquaintance outside the family."

"Oh, I cannot lay claim to an acquaintance with her, as I have only seen her once, and our meeting was purely accidental," the lady responded. "She rendered me efficient service one day when she was out for a walk, and I inquired her name."

She then proceeded to explain the nature of that service and the accident that had called it forth, and concluded by remarking:

"Allow me to say I think that Monsieur Correlli has shown excellent taste in his choice of a wife. I was charmed with the young lady, and I would like to meet her again. Will you introduce me?" and she looked eagerly about the room in search of the graceful form and lovely face which she was so desirous of seeing.

"I am very sorry that I cannot comply with your request," said Mrs. Goddard, flushing slightly; "but Edith is rather delicate and the reception, after the marriage, was such a strain upon her that she fainted and was obliged to retire."

"That was very unfortunate," Mrs. Stewart observed, while she searched her companion's face curiously, "but I trust that I may have the pleasure of meeting her later."

"I cannot promise as to that," madam replied, "as it is my brother's intention to go abroad as soon as he can complete his arrangements to do so, although no date has been set as yet. But—have you ever met my husband. Mrs. Stewart?" she inquired, as that gentleman was seen approaching their way that moment.

"No, I have never had that honor," the lady returned; then added, with a light laugh: "I feel very much like an intruder to be here to-night as a stranger to both my host and hostess."

"Pray do not be troubled on that account," madam hastened cordially to reply: "any friend of my brother would be a welcome guest, and I am charmed to have made your acquaintance."

"Thank you," responded the beautiful stranger; but madam marveled at the line of white encircling the scarlet lips, as she signaled to her husband and called him by name:

"Gerald."

He glanced up, and both women noticed the expression of weariness and trouble upon his brow.

"You have not been introduced to Emil's friend, I think," his wife continued. "Allow me to present Mrs. Stewart—Mrs. Stewart, my husband, Mr. Goddard."

The gentleman bowed with all his accustomed courtesy, but did not fairly get a glimpse of the lady's face until they both assumed an upright position again, when he found himself looking straight into the magnificent eyes of his guest.

As he met them it seemed as if some one had stabbed him to the heart, so sudden and terrible was the shock that he experienced.

He changed an involuntary groan into a cough, but he could not have been more ghastly if he had been dead, while he continued to gaze upon her as if fascinated.

"Ha! he has noticed it also!" said madam to herself, with a sudden heart-sinking.

Then realizing that something must be done to relieve the awkwardness of the situation, she hastened to observe:

"Mrs. Stewart has only just arrived—she did not come in season to witness our little drama."

Mr. Goddard murmured some polite words of regret, but feeling all the while as if he were turning to stone.

Mrs. Stewart, however, responded in a pleasant vein, and chatted sociably for a few moments, when, some other friends joining them, more introductions followed, and the conversation became general.

Gerald Goddard improved this opportunity to slip away; but his wife, who was covertly watching his every look and movement, noticed that he walked with the uncertain step of one who was either blind or intoxicated.

A feeling of depression settled upon her—a sense of impending evil, which, try as she would, she could neither forget nor shake off.

She began to be very impatient of all the glitter, glare, and gayety around her, and told herself that she would be heartily glad when the last dance was over, and the last guest had departed.

Truly, there is many an aching heart hidden beneath costly raiment and glittering jewels; and society is, to a large extent, but a smiling mask in which people hold high revel over the tombs of dead hopes and disappointed ambitions.

But fashion and folly must have their time; and so, in spite of madam's heart-ache and weariness, the dancing and merriment went on, no one dreamed of the phantom memories and the ghosts from out the past that were stalking about the beautiful rooms of that elegant mansion; or that its enviable (?) master and mistress were treading upon the verge of a volcano which, at any moment, was liable to burst all bounds and pour forth its furious lava-tide to consume them.

An hour later Mrs. Stewart again sought her hostess and wished her good-night, remarking that circumstances which she could not control compelled her to take an early leave.

"Ah! that is unfortunate, for supper will shortly be announced; cannot you possibly remain to partake of it?" madam urged, with cordial hospitality.

"Thanks, no; but I am promising myself the pleasure of meeting you again in the near future," Mrs. Stewart returned, shooting a searching glance at her hostess.

Her language and manner were perfect; but, for the second time that evening, Anna Goddard noticed the peculiar shading in her words, and a chill that was like a breath from an iceberg went shivering over her.

She, however, replied courteously, and then Mrs. Stewart swept from the room upon the arm of her attendant.

Many earnest and curious glances followed the stately couple, for the lady was reported to be immensely rich, while it had also been whispered that the gentleman attending her—a distinguished artist—had long been a suitor for her hand; but, for some reason best known to herself, the lady had thus far turned a deaf ear to his entreaties, although it was evident that she regarded him with the greatest esteem, if not with sentiments of a tenderer nature.

After passing through the covered walk leading to the house, the two separated—the gentleman to attend to having their carriage called, the lady to go upstairs for her wraps.

As she was about to enter the dressing-room to get them, a picture hanging between two windows at the end of the hall attracted her eye.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, catching her breath sharply, and moving swiftly toward it, she seemed to forget everything, and stood, with clasped hands and heaving bosom, spell-bound before it.

It represented a portion of an old Roman wall—a marvelously picturesque bit of scenery, with climbing vines that seemed to cling to the gray stones lovingly, as if to conceal their irregular lines and other ravages which time and the elements had made upon them; while here and there, growing out from its crevices, were clusters of delicate maiden-hair fern, the bright green of which contrasted beautifully with the weather-beaten wall and the darker, richer coloring of the vines.

Just underneath, partly in the shadow of the wall, there sat, upon a rustic bench, a beautiful Italian girl, dressed in the costume of her country, while at her feet reclined her lover, his hat lying on the grass beside him, his handsome face upturned to the maiden, whom it was evident he adored.

It was a charming picture, very artistic, and finely executed, while the subject was one that appealed strongly to the tenderest sentiments of the human heart.

But the face of the woman who was gazing upon it was deathly white. She was motionless as a statue, and seemed to have forgotten time, place, and her surroundings, as she drank in with her wonderful eyes the scene before her.

"It is the wall upon the Appian Way in Rome," she breathed at last, with a long-drawn sigh.

"You are right, madam," responded a voice close at hand, the sound of which caused the woman to press her clasped hands hard upon her heaving bosom, though she gave no other sign of being startled.

The next moment she turned and faced the speaker.

It was Gerald Goddard.

"I heard no one approaching—I thought I was alone," she said, as she lifted those wonderful eyes of hers to his.

He shrank from her glance as under a lightning flash that had burst upon him unawares.

But quickly recovering himself, he courteously remarked:

"Pardon me—I trust I have not startled you."

"Only momentarily," she replied; then added: "I was admiring this painting; it is very lovely and—most faithfully portrays the scene from which it was copied."

"Ah! you recognize the—the locality?"

"Perfectly."

"You—you have been in—Rome?" the man faltered.

"Oh, yes."

"Recently?"

There was a sort of breathless intensity about the man as he asked this question.

"No; I was in Rome—in the year 18—."

At this response, Gerald Goddard involuntarily put out his hand and laid it upon the balustrade, near which he was standing, while he gazed spell-bound into the proud, beautiful face before him, searching it with wild, eager eyes.

After a moment he partially recovered himself, and remarked:

"Is it possible? I myself was in Rome during the same year and painted this picture at that time. Were—were you in the city long?" he concluded, in a voice that trembled in spite of himself.

"From January until—until June."

For the second time that evening Mr. Goddard suppressed a groan with a cough.

"Ah! It is a singular coincidence, is it not, that I also was there during those months?" he finally managed to articulate.

"A coincidence?" his companion repeated, with a slight lifting of her shapely brows, a curious gleam in her eyes. Then throwing back her head with an air of defiance which was intensified by the glitter of those magnificent stones which crowned her lustrous hair, and with a peculiar cadence ringing through her tones, she observed: "Rome is a lovely city—do you not think so? And, as it happened, I resided in a delightful portion of it. Possibly you may remember the locality. It was a charming little house, with beautiful trees—oleander, orange, and fig—growing all around the spacious court. This pretty ideal home was Number 34, Via Nazionale."

The wretched man stared helplessly at her for one brief moment when she had concluded, then a cry of despair burst from him.

"Oh, God! I knew it! You—you are Isabel?"

"Yes."

"Then you were not—you did not—"

"Die? No," was the brief response; but the beautiful eyes looking so steadily into his seemed to burn into his very soul.



A mighty shudder shook Gerald Goddard from head to foot as he reeled backward and leaned against the wall for support.

"Oh, God!" he cried again, in a voice of agony; then his head dropped heavily upon his breast.

His companion gazed silently upon him for a minute; then, turning, she brushed by him without a word and went on into the dressing-room for her wraps.

Presently she came forth again, enveloped from head to foot in a long garment richly lined with fur, the scarlet lining of the hood contrasting beautifully with her clear, flawless complexion and her brown eyes.

Gerald Goddard still stood where she had left him.

She would have passed him without a word, but he put out a trembling hand to detain her.

"Isabel!" he faltered.

"Mrs. Stewart, if you please," she corrected, in a cold, proud tone.

"Ha! you have married again!" he exclaimed, with a start, while he searched her face with a despairing look.

"Married again?" she repeated, with curling lips. "I have not so perjured myself."

"But—but—"

"Yes, I know what you would say," she interposed, with a proud little gesture; "nevertheless, I claim the matron's title, and 'Stewart' was my mother's maiden name," and she was about to pass on again.

"Stay!" said the man, nervously. "I—I must see you again—I must talk further with you."

"Very well," the lady coldly returned, "and I also have some things which I wish to say to you. I shall be at the Copley Square Hotel on Thursday afternoon. I will see you as early as you choose to call."

Then, with an air of grave dignity, she passed on, and down the stairs, without casting one backward glance at him.

The man leaned over the balustrade and watched her.

She moved like a queen.

In the hall below she was joined by her attendant, whom she welcomed with a ravishing smile, and the next moment they had passed out of the house together.

"Heavens! and I deserted that glorious woman for—a virago!" Gerald Goddard muttered, hoarsely, as he strode, white and wretched, to his room.



## **CHAPTER XVI.**

## "YOU SHALL NEVER WANT FOR A FRIEND."

Up in the third story, poor Edith lay upon her bed, still in an unconscious state.

All the wedding finery had been removed and carried away, and she lay scarcely less white than the spotless *robe de nuit* she wore, her lips blue and pinched, her eyes sunken and closed.

A physician sat beside her, his fingers upon her pulse, his eyes gravely fixed upon the beautiful, waxen face lying on the pillow.

Two housemaids, looking frightened and anxious, were seated near him, watching him and the still figure on the bed, but ready to obey whatever command he might issue to them.

After introducing his sister to Mrs. Stewart, Emil Correlli had slipped away from the scene of gayety, which had become almost maddening to him, and mounted to that third-story room to inquire again regarding the condition of the girl he had so wronged.

"No better," came the answer, which made him turn with dread, and a terrible fear to take possession of his heart.

What if Edith should never revive? What if she should die in one of these dreadful swoons?

His guilty conscience warned him that he would have been her murderer.

He could not endure the thought, and slinking away to his own room, he drank deeply to stupefy himself, and then went to bed.

Gerald Goddard also was strangely exercised over the fair girl's condition, and half an hour after his interview with Mrs. Stewart he crept forth from his room again and went to see if there had been any change in her condition.

"Yes," Dr. Arthur told him, "she is coming out of it, and if another does not follow, she will come around all right in time. If you could only find that housekeeper," he added, "she must have good care through the night."

"I will go for her again," said Mr. Goddard, and he started downstairs upon his

quest.

He met the woman on the second floor and just coming up the back stairs.

"Ah! Mrs. Weld, I am glad to find you. We have needed you sadly," he eagerly exclaimed.

"I am sorry," the woman replied, in a regretful tone. "I was unavoidably engaged and came just as soon as I was at liberty. What is this I hear?" she continued, gravely; "what is this story about the poor child being cheated into a real marriage with madam's brother? Is it true?"

"Hush! no one must hear such a version," said Mr. Goddard, looking anxiously about him.

He then proceeded to explain something of the matter, for he saw that she knew too much to keep still, unless she was told more, and cautioned not to discuss the matter with the servants.

"I knew nothing of the plot until it was all over—I swear to you I did not," he said, when she began to express her indignation at the affair. "I never would have permitted anything of the kind to have been carried out in my house, if I had suspected it. It seems that Correlli has been growing fond of her ever since he came. She has refused him twice, but he swore that he would have her, in spite of everything, and it seems that he concocted this plot to accomplish his end."

"Well, sir, he is a dastardly villain, and, in my opinion, his sister is no better than himself," Mrs. Weld exclaimed, in tones of hot indignation, and then she swept past him and on up to Edith's room.

She opened the door and entered just as the poor girl heaved a long sigh and unclosed her eyes, looking about with complete consciousness for the first time since she fell to the floor in the parlor below.

The physician immediately administered a stimulant, for she was naturally weak and her pulses still feeble.

As this began to take effect, memory also resumed its torturing work.

Lifting her eyes to the housekeeper, who went at once to her side, a spasm of agony convulsed her beautiful features.

"Oh, Mrs. Weld!" she moaned, shivering from head to foot.

"Hush, child!" said the woman, bending over her and laying a gentle hand upon her head; "it will all come right, so just shut your eyes and try to go to sleep. I am going to stay with you to-night, and nobody else shall come near you. Don't talk before the servants," she added, in a swift whisper close to her ear.

An expression of intense relief swept over the fair sufferer's face at this friendly assurance, and lifting a grateful look to the housekeeper's face, she settled herself contentedly upon her pillow.

Dr. Arthur then drew Mrs. Weld to the opposite side of the room, where he gave her directions for the night and what to do in case the fainting should return—which, however, he said he did not anticipate, as the action of the heart had become normal and the circulation more natural.

A little later he took his leave, after which the housemaids were dismissed and Edith was alone with her friend.

When the door closed after them the girl stretched forth her hands in a gesture of helpless appeal to the woman.

"Oh, Mrs. Weld," she wailed, "must I be bound to that wretch during the remainder of my life? I cannot live and bear such a fate! Oh, what a shameful mockery it was! I felt, all the time, as if I were committing a sacrilege, and yet I never dreamed that I was being used so treacherously—"

The housekeeper sat down beside the excited girl, whose eyes were burning with a feverish light, and who showed symptoms of returning hysteria.

She removed her spectacles, and taking both of those trembling hands in hers, looked steadily into the troubled eyes.

"My child," she said, in a gentle, soothing tone, "you must not talk about it to-night—you must not even think about it. I have told you that it will all come out right; no man could hold you to such a marriage—no court would hold you bound when once it is understood how fraudulently you had been drawn into it."

"But who is going to be able to prove that it was fraudulent?" questioned Edith with increasing anxiety. "Apparently I went to the altar with that man of my own free will; with all the semblance of sincerity I took those marriage vows upon me and then received the congratulations of all those guests as if I were a real wife. Oh, it was terrible! terrible! terrible!" and her voice arose almost to a shriek of agony as she concluded.

"Hush! not another word! Edith look at me!" commanded Mrs. Weld with gentle but impressive authority.

The young girl, awed to silence in spite of her grief and nervous excitement, looked wonderingly up into those magnetic eyes which almost seemed to betray a dual nature.

"Oh, dear Mrs. Weld, you do not seem at all like yourself," she gasped. "What—who are you?"

"I am your friend, my dear," was the soothing response, "and I am going to prove it, first by forbidding you to refer to this subject again until after you have had a nice, long sleep. Trust me and obey me, dear; I am going to stand by you as long as you need a friend, and I promise you that you shall never be a slave to the man who has so wronged you to-night. Now put it all out of your mind. I do not want to give you an opiate if I can avoid it, for you would not be so well to-morrow after taking it; but I shall have to if you keep up this excitement."

She continued to hold the girl's trembling hands in a strong, protecting clasp, while she still gazed steadily into her eyes, until, as if overcome by a will stronger than her own—her physical strength being well-nigh exhausted—the white lids gradually drooped, the rigid form relaxed, the lines smoothed themselves out of her brow, and she was soon sleeping quietly and restfully.

When her regular breathing assured the watcher beside her that oblivion had sealed her senses for the time, she bent over her, touched her lips softly to her forehead, and murmured:

"Dear heart, they shall never hold you to that wicked ceremony—to that unholy bond! If the law will not cancel it, if they have sprung the trap upon you so cunningly that the court cannot free you, they shall at least leave you in peace and virtually free, and you shall never want for a friend as long as—as—Gertrude Weld lives," she concluded, a peculiar smile wreathing her lips.

While this strange woman sat in that third-story room and watched her sleeping patient, the hours sped by on rapid wings to the merry dancers below, very few of whom concerned themselves about, or even knew of, the tragic ending of the marriage which they had witnessed earlier in the evening.

But oh, how heavily these hours dragged to one among that smiling throng!

Anna Goddard could scarcely control her impatience for her guests to be gone—

for the terrible farce to end.

How terrible it all was to her not one of the gay people around her could suspect, for she was obliged to fawn and smile as if she were in thorough sympathy with the scene, and to attend to her duties as hostess and to all the petty details required by so-called etiquette, in order to preserve the prestige which she had acquired for entertaining handsomely.

But there was a deadly fear at her heart—an agony of apprehension, a dread of a fate which, to her, would have been worse than death.

Her husband and brother had disappeared entirely from the ball-room, a circumstance which only added to her perplexity and distress.

When she saw signs of the ball breaking up she sent an imperative message to her husband to join her, for she knew that it would cause unpleasant remarks if the master of the house should fail to put in an appearance to "speed the parting guest."

But she almost wished, when he came to her side, that she had not sent for him, for he seemed like one who had lost his hold upon every hope in the world, and looked so coldly upon her that she would rather have had him plunge a dagger into her heart.

But the weary evening was over at length—the last guest from outside was gone—the last visitor in the house had retired.

Her husband also had watched his opportunity, when she was looking another way, and had slipped out of the room and upstairs to escape having any complaints or questions from her.

And so Anna Goddard stood alone in her elegant drawing-room, a most miserable woman, in spite of the luxury that surrounded her.

She had everything that heart could wish of this world's goods—a beautiful home in the city, another in the country, horses, carriages, servants, fine raiment, costly jewels, and fared sumptuously every day.

But her heart was like a sepulcher, full of corruption that had tainted her whole life; and now, as she stood there beneath the glare of a hundred lights, so fair to look upon in her gleaming satins and flashing jewels, it seemed to her that she would gladly exchange places with the humblest country-woman if thereby she



could be at peace with herself and with God, and be the center of a loving and loyal family, happy in the performances of her simple duties as a wife and mother.

Finally, with a weary sigh, the unhappy woman went slowly upstairs, feeling as if, in spite of the smiles and compliments which she had that evening received, she had not a real friend in the world.

Going to her dressing-case, she began to remove her jewels.

The house was very still—so still that it almost seemed deserted, and this feeling only served to add to the sense of loneliness and desolation that was oppressing her.

Her face was full of pain, her beautiful lips quivered with suppressed emotion as she gathered up her costly treasures in both hands and stood looking at them a moment, thinking bitterly how much money they represented, and yet of how little real value they were to her as an essential element in her life.

She moved toward her casket to put her gems carefully away.

She stood looking down into the box for a minute, then, as if impelled by some irresistible impulse, she laid the priceless stones all in a heap upon the table, when, taking hold of a loop, which had escaped the housekeeper's notice, she lifted the cushion from its place, thus revealing the papers which had been concealed beneath it.

She seized the uppermost one with an eager hand.

"I believe I will destroy it," she mused, "I am afraid there is something more in his desire to possess it than he is willing to admit, for he is so determined to get possession of it."

She half unfolded the document as if to examine it, when a sudden shock went quivering through her frame and a look of amazement overspread her face.

"What can this mean?" she exclaimed, in a tone of alarm, as she dashed it upon the floor and seized another.

This also proved disappointing.

"It was here the last time I looked! I am sure I left it on top of the others!" she muttered, with white lips, as, with trembling hands and heaving bosom, she

overturned everything in search of the missing document.

But the most rigid examination failed to reveal it, and, with a cry of mingled agony and anger, she sank weak and trembling upon the nearest chair.

"It is gone!" she whispered, hoarsely; "some one has stolen it!"

She sat there looking utterly helpless and wretched for a few moments.

Then her eyes began to blaze and her lips to twitch spasmodically.

"He has done this!" she cried, starting to her feet once more. "That was why he was absent so long from the ball-room to-night."

Seizing the papers she had removed from the box, she hastily replaced them, also the cushion, restoring the jewels to their places, after which she shut and locked the casket, taking care to remove the key from its lock.

This done, she hurried from the room, looking more like a beautiful fiend than a woman.



## **CHAPTER XVII.**

## **"WOULD YOU DARE BE FALSE TO ME, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS?"**

With her exquisite robe trailing unheeded after her, Anna Goddard swept swiftly down the hall and rapped imperatively upon the door of her husband's room.

There was no answer from within.

She tried the handle. The door would not yield—it was locked on the inside.

"Gerald, are you in bed?" his wife inquired, putting her lips to the crack and speaking low.

"What do you wish, Anna?" the man questioned.

"I wish to see you—I must speak with you, even if you have retired," she returned, imperatively.

There was a slight movement within the room, then the door was thrown open, and Gerald Goddard stood before her.

But she shrank back almost immediately, a low exclamation of surprise escaping her as she saw his face, so white, so pain-drawn, and haggard.

"Gerald! what is the matter?" she demanded, forgetting, for the moment, her own anger and even her errand there, in the anxiety which she experienced for him.

"I am feeling quite well, Anna," he responded, in a mechanical tone. "What is it you wish to say to me?"

Sweeping into the room, she closed the door after her, then confronted him with accusing mien.

"What do I wish to say to you?" she repeated, her voice quivering with passion, her eyes blazing with a fierce expression. "I want that paper which you have stolen from me."

"I—I do not understand you, Anna," the man began, in a pre-occupied manner. "What paper—what—"

"I will bear no trifling," she passionately cried, interrupting him. "You know very well what paper I refer to—I never had but one document in my possession in which you had any interest; the one you have so beset me about during the last few weeks."

"That?" exclaimed the man, at last aroused from the apathy which had hitherto seemed to possess him.

"That!" retorted his companion, mockingly imitating his tone, "as if you did not very well know it was 'that,' and no other. Gerald Goddard, I have come to demand it of you," she went on shrilly. "You have no right to enter my rooms, like a thief, and steal my treasures! I—"

"Anna, be still!" commanded her husband, sternly. "You are losing control of yourself, and some of our guests may overhear you. I know nothing of the document."

"You lie!" hissed the woman, almost beside herself with mingled rage and fear. "Who, but you, could have any interest in the thing? who, save you, even knew of its existence, or that it had ever been in my possession? Give it back to me! I will have it! It's my only safeguard. You knew it, and you have stolen it, to make yourself independent of me."

"Anna, you shall not demean either yourself or me by giving expression to such unjust suspicions," Gerald Goddard returned with cold dignity. "I swear to you that I do not know anything about the paper. I have not even once laid my eyes upon it since you stole it from me. If it has been taken from the place where you have kept it concealed," he went on, "then other hands than mine have been guilty of the theft."

There was the ring of truth in his words, and she was forced to believe him; yet there was a mystery about the affair which was beyond her fathoming.

"Then who could have taken it," she gasped, growing ghastly white at the thought of there being a third party to their secret—"who on earth has done this thing?"

Gerald Goddard was silent. He had his suspicions, suspicions that made him quake inwardly, as he thought of what might be the outcome of them if they should prove to be true.

"Gerald, why do you not answer me?" his companion impatiently demanded.

"Can you think of any one who would be likely to rob us in this way?"

"Have you no suspicion, Anna?" the man asked, and looking gravely into her eyes. "Was there no one among your guests to-night, who—"

"Who—what—!" she cried, as he faltered and stopped.

"Was there no one present who made you think of—of some one whom you—have known in the—the past?"

"Ha! do you refer to Mrs. Stewart?" said madam. "Did you also notice the—resemblance?"

"Could any one help it?—could any one ever mistake those eyes? Anna—she was Isabel herself!"

"No—no!" she panted wildly, "she may be some relative. Are you losing your mind? Isabel is—dead."

"She lives!"

"I tell you no! I—saw her dead."

"You? How could that be possible?" exclaimed Mr. Goddard, in astonishment. "We were both in Florence at the time of that tragedy."

"Nevertheless, I saw her dead and in her coffin," persisted his companion, with positive emphasis.

"Now you talk as if you were losing your mind," he answered, with white lips.

"I am not. Do you not remember I told you one morning, I was going to spend a couple of days with a friend at Fiesole?"

"Yes."

"Well, I had read of that tragedy that very day, and then hid the paper, but I did not go to Fiesole at all. I took the first train for Rome."

"Anna!"

"I wanted to be sure," she cried, excitedly. "I was jealous of her, I—hated her; and I knew that if the report was true I should be at rest. I went to the place where they had taken her. Some one had cared for her very tenderly—she lay as

if asleep, and looked like a beautiful piece of sculpture in her white robe; one could hardly believe that she was—dead. But they told me they were going to— to bury her that afternoon unless some one came to claim her. They asked me if I had known her—if she was a friend of mine. I told them no—she was nothing to me; I had simply come out of curiosity, having seen the story of her tragic end in a paper. Then I took the next train back to Florence."

"Why have you never told me this before, Anna?" Gerald Goddard inquired, with lips that were perfectly colorless, while he laid his hand upon the back of a chair for support.

"Why?" she flashed out jealously at him. "Why should I talk of her to you? She was dead—she could never come between us, and I wished to put her entirely out of my mind, since I had satisfied myself of the fact."

"Did—did you hear anything of—of—"

"Of the child? No; all I ever knew was what you yourself read in the paper—that both mother and child had disappeared from their home and both were supposed to have suffered the same fate, although the body of the child was not found."

"Oh!" groaned Gerald Goddard, wiping the clammy moisture from his brow. "I never realized the horror of it as I do at this moment, and I never have forgiven myself for not going to Rome to institute a search for myself; but—"

"But I wouldn't let you, I suppose you were about to add," said madam, bitterly. "What was the use?" she went on, angrily. "Everything was all over before you knew anything about it—"

"I could at least have erected a tablet to mark her resting-place," the man interposed.

"Ha! ha! it strikes me it was rather late then to manifest much sentiment; that would have become you better before you broke her heart and killed her by your neglect and desertion," sneered madam, who was driven to the verge of despair by this late exhibition of regard for a woman whom she had hated.

"Don't, Anna!" he cried, sharply. Then suddenly straightening himself, he said, as if just awaking from some horrible nightmare: "But she did not die. I have not that on my conscience, after all."

"She did—I tell you she did!" hoarsely retorted the excited woman.

"But I have seen and talked with her to-night, and she told me that she was—Isabel!" he persisted.

Anna Goddard struck her palms together with a gesture bordering upon despair.

"I do not believe it—I will not believe it!" she panted.

"He began to pity her, for he also was beginning to realize that, if Isabel Stewart were really the woman whom he had wronged more than twenty years previous, her situation was indeed deplorable.

"Anna," he said, gravely, and speaking with more calmness and gentleness than at any time during the interview, "this is a stern fact, and—we must look it in the face."

His tone and manner carried conviction to her heart.

She sank crouching at his feet, bowing her face upon her hands.

"Gerald! Gerald! it must not be so!" she wailed. "It is only some cunning story invented to cheat us and avenge her. That woman shall never separate us—I will never yield to her. Oh, Heaven! why did I not destroy that paper when I had it? Gerald, give it to me now, if you have it; it is not too late to burn it even now, and no one can prove the truth—we can defy her to the last."

The man stooped to raise her from her humiliating position.

"Get up, Anna," he said, kindly. "Come, sit in this chair and let us talk the matter over calmly. It is a stern fact that Isabel is alive and well, and it is useless either to ignore it or deplore it."

With shivering sobs bursting from her with every breath, the wretched woman allowed herself to be helped to the chair, into which she sank with an air of abject despair.

Anna Goddard's was not a nature likely to readily yield to humiliation or defeat, and after a few moments of silent battle with herself, she raised her head and turned her proud face and searching eyes upon her companion.

"You say that it is a 'stern fact' that Isabel lives," she remarked, with compressed lips.

"I am sure—there can be no mistake," the man replied. Then he told her of the



interview which had occurred in the hall, where he had found the woman standing before the picture which he had painted in Rome so many years ago.

"She recognized it at once," he said; "she located the very spot from which I had painted the scene."

"Oh, I cannot make it seem possible, for I tell you I saw her lying dead in her casket," moaned madam, who, even in the face of all proofs, could not bring herself to believe that her old rival was living and had it in her power to ruin her life.

"She must have been in a trance—she must have been resuscitated by those people who found her. As sure as you and I both live, she is living also," Mr. Goddard solemnly responded.

"Oh, how could such a thing be?"

"I do not know—she did not tell me; she was very cold and proud."

"What was she doing here? How dared she enter this house?" cried madam, her anger blazing up again.

"I cannot tell you. It was a question I was asking myself just as you came to the door," said Mr. Goddard, with a sigh. "I have no doubt she had some deep-laid purpose, however."

"Do you imagine her purpose was to get possession of that document?" questioned madam.

"I had thought of that—I have felt almost sure of it since you told me it had disappeared."

"But how could she have known that such a paper was in our possession? You did not receive it until long after—"

"Yes, I know," interposed Mr. Goddard, with a shiver; "nevertheless I am impressed that it is now in her possession, even though I did not suppose that any one, save you and I and Will Forsyth, ever knew of its existence."

There ensued an interval of silence, during which both appeared to be absorbed in deep thought.

"If she has it, what will she do with it?" madam suddenly questioned, lifting her

heavy eyes to her companion.

"I am sure I cannot tell, Anna," he coldly returned.

His tone was like a match applied to powder.

"Well, then, what will you do, Gerald Goddard, in view of the fact, as you believe, that she is alive and has learned the truth?" she imperiously demanded.

"I—I do not think it will be wise for us to discuss that point just at present," he faltered.

"Coward! Is that your answer to me after twenty years of adoration and devotion?" cried the enraged woman, springing excitedly to her feet, the look of a slumbering demon in her dusky eyes.

"After twenty years of jealousy, bickering, and turmoil, you should have said, Anna," was the bitter response.

"Beware! Beware, Gerald! I have hot blood in my veins, as you very well know," was the menacing retort.

"I have long had a proof of that," he returned, with quiet irony.

"Oh!" she cried, putting up her hand as if to ward off a blow, "you are cruel to me." Then, with sudden passion, she added: "Perhaps, after all, that document is in your possession—or at least that you know something about it."

"I only wish your surmise were correct, Anna; for, in that case, I should have no cause to fear her," said Mr. Goddard, gravely.

"Ha! Even you do 'fear' her?" cried madam, eagerly. "In what way?"

"Can you not see? If she has gained possession of the paper, she has it in her power to do both of us irreparable harm," the gentleman explained.

Anna Goddard shivered.

"Yes, yes," she moaned, "she could make society ring with our names—she could ruin us, socially; but"—shooting a stealthy glance at her companion, who sat with bowed head and clouded brow—"I could better bear that than that she should assert a claim upon you—that she should use her power to—to separate us. She shall not, Gerald!" she went on, passionately; "there are other countries where you and I can go and be happy, utterly indifferent to what she may do

here."

The man made no reply to these words—he was apparently absorbed in his own thoughts.

"Gerald! have you nothing to say to me?" madam sharply cried, after watching him for a full minute.

"What can I say, Anna? There is nothing that either of us can do but await further developments," the man returned, but careful to keep to himself the fact that he had an appointment with the woman whom she so feared and hated.

"Would you dare to be false to me, after all these years?" his companion demanded, in repressed tones, and leaning toward him with flaming eyes.

"Pshaw, Anna! what a senseless question," he replied, with a forced laugh.

"But you admire—you think her very beautiful?" she questioned, eagerly.

"Why, that is a self-evident fact—every one must admit that she is a fine-looking woman," was the somewhat evasive response.

Anna Goddard sprang to her feet, her face scarlet.

"You will be very careful what you do, Gerald," she hissed. "I have never had overmuch confidence in you, in spite of my love for you; but there is one thing that I will not bear, at this late day, and that is, that you should turn traitor to me; so be warned in time."

She did not wait to see what effect her words would have upon him, but, turning abruptly, swept from the room, leaving him to his own reflections.

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## **CHAPTER XVIII.**

## **"I SHALL NEVER FORGIVE EITHER OF YOU FOR YOUR SIN AGAINST ME."**

The morning following the great Goddard ball at Wyoming, found Edith much better, greatly to the surprise of every one.

She was quite weak, as was but natural after such a shock to her system, both physically and mentally; but she had slept very quietly through the night, after the housekeeper had gone to her and thrown the protection of her presence around her.

At Emil Correlli's request, the physician had remained in the house all night, in case he should be wanted; and when he visited her quite early in the morning, he expressed himself very much gratified to find her so comfortable, and said she would do well enough without any further medical treatment, but advised her to keep quiet for a day or two.

This Edith appeared perfectly willing to do, and lay contentedly among her pillows, watching her kind nurse while she put the room in order, making no remarks, asking no questions, but with a look of grave resolve growing in her eyes and about her sweet mouth, which betrayed that she was doing a good deal of thinking upon some subject.

Mrs. Goddard came to her door immediately after breakfast, but Edith refused to see her.

She had told Mrs. Weld not to admit any one; therefore, when the lady of the house sought admittance, the housekeeper firmly but respectfully denied her entrance.

"But I have something very important to say to Edith," madam persisted.

"Then it had best be left unsaid until the poor girl is stronger," Mrs. Weld replied, without moving her portly proportions and holding the door firmly in her hand.

"I have a message from my brother for her—it is necessary that I should deliver it," Mrs. Goddard obstinately returned. Mrs. Weld looked back into the room

inquiringly.

"I do not wish to see any one," Edith weakly responded, but in a voice of decision which told the listener outside that the girl had no intention of yielding the point.

"Very well; then I will wait until she feels stronger," said the baffled woman, whereupon she beat an ignominious retreat, and the invalid was left in peace.

Mrs. Weld spent as much time as possible with her, but she of course had her duties below to attend to; so, at Edith's request, she locked her in and took the key with her when she was obliged to go downstairs.

Once, while she was absent, some one crept stealthily to the door and knocked.

Edith started up, and leaned upon her elbow, a momentary look of fear sweeping her face; but she made no response.

The knock was repeated.

Still the girl remained motionless and voiceless, only her great blue eyes began to blaze with mingled indignation and contempt, for she knew, instinctively, who was seeking admission.

"Miss Al—Edith, I must speak with you—I must have an interview with you," said the voice of Emil Correlli from without.

Still no answer from within; but the dazzling gleam in the girl's eyes plainly showed that that voice had aroused all the spirit within her in spite of her weak condition.

"Pray grant me an interview, Edith—I have much to say to you—much to explain—much to entreat of you," continued the voice, with a note of earnest appeal.

But he might as well have addressed the walls for all the effect he produced.

There was a moment or two of silence, then the man continued, with something of authority:

"I have the right to come to you, Edith—I have a right to demand that you regard my wishes. If you are not prepared to receive me just now, name some time when I can see you, and I will wait patiently your pleasure; only speak and tell

me that you will comply with my request."

It was both a pretty and a striking picture behind that closed door, if he could but have seen it—the fair girl, in her snowy robe, over which she had slipped a pretty light blue sack, reclining upon her elbow, her beautiful hair falling in graceful confusion about her shoulders; her violet eyes gleaming with a look of triumph in her advantage over the man without; her lips—into which the color was beginning to flow naturally again—parted just enough to reveal the milk-white teeth between them.

When the man outside asserted his right to come to her, the only sign she had made was a little toss of her golden-crowned head, indicative of defiance, while about the corners of her lovely mouth there lurked a smile of scorn that would have been maddening to Emil Correlli could he have seen it.

At last a discontented muttering and the sound of retreating steps in the hall told her that her persecutor had become discouraged, and gone. Then, with a sigh of relief, she sank back upon her pillow feeling both weak and weary from excitement.

Left alone once more, she fell into deep thought.

In spite of a feeling of despair which, at times, surged over her in view of the trying position in which she found herself, the base deception practiced upon her, aroused a spirit of indomitable resistance, to battle for herself and her outraged feelings, and outwit, if possible, these enemies of her peace.

"They have done this wicked thing—that woman and her brother," she said to herself; "they have cunningly plotted to lure me into this trap; but, though they have succeeded in fettering me for life, that is all the satisfaction that they will ever reap from their scheme. They cannot compel me, against my will, to live with a man whom I abhor. Even though I stood up before that multitude last evening, and appeared a willing actor in that disgraceful sacrilegious scene, no one can make me abide by it, and I shall denounce and defy them both; the world shall at least ring with scorn for their deed, even though I cannot free myself by proving a charge of fraud against them. But, oh—"

The proud little head suddenly drooped, and with a moan of pain she covered her convulsed face with her hands, as her thoughts flew to a certain room in New York, where she had spent one happy, blissful week in learning to love, with all her soul, the man whom she had served.

She had believed, as we know, that her love for Royal Bryant was hopeless—at least she had told herself so, and that she could never link her fate with his, after learning of her shameful origin.

Yet, now that there appeared to have arisen an even greater barrier, she began to realize that all hope had not been quite dead—that, in her heart, she had all the time been nursing a tender shoot of affection, and a faint belief that her lover would never relinquish his desire to win her.

But these sad thoughts finally set her mind running in another channel, and brought a gleam of hope to her.

"He is a true and honorable man," she mused, "I will appeal to him in my trouble; and if any one can find a loop-hole of escape for me I am sure he will be able to do so."

When Mrs. Weld brought her lunch, she sat up and ate it eagerly, resolved to get back her strength as soon as possibly in order to carry out her project at an early date. While she was eating, she told her friend of Emil Correlli's visit and its result.

"Why cannot they let you alone!" the woman cried, indignantly. "They shall not persecute you so."

"No, I do not intend they shall," Edith quietly replied, "but I think by to-morrow morning, I shall feel strong enough for an interview, when we will have my relations toward them established for all time," and by the settling of the girl's pretty chin, Mrs. Weld was convinced that she would be lacking in neither spirit nor decision.

"If you feel able to talk about it now, I wish you would tell me exactly how they managed to hoodwink you to such an extent. Perhaps I may be of some service to you, when the matter comes to a crisis," the woman remarked, as she studied the sweet face before her with kind and pitying eyes.

And Edith related just how Mrs. Goddard had drawn her into the net by representing that two of her actors had been called away in the midst of the play and that the whole representation would be spoiled unless she would consent to help her out.

"It was very cleverly done," said Mrs. Weld, when she concluded; but she looked grave, for she saw that the entire affair had been so adroitly managed, it would



be very difficult to prove that Edith had not been in the secret and a willing actor in the drama. "But do not worry, child; you may depend upon me to do my utmost to help you in every possible way."

The next morning Edith was able to be up and dressed, and she began to pack her trunk, preparatory to going away. The guests had all left on the previous day, and everything was being put in order for the house to be closed for the remainder of the winter, while it was stated that the family would return to the city on the next day, which would be Thursday.

Edith had almost everything ready for removal by noon, and, after lunch was over, sent word to Mrs. Goddard that she would like an interview with her.

The woman came immediately, and Edith marveled to see how pale and worn she looked—how she had appeared to age during the last day or two.

"I am so glad that you have decided to see me, Edith," she remarked, in a fondly confidential tone, as she drew a chair to the girl's side and sat down. "My brother is nearly distracted with grief and remorse over what has happened, and the attitude which you have assumed toward him. He adores you—he will be your slave if you only take the right way to win him. Surely, you will forgive him for the deception which his great affection led him to practice upon you," she concluded, with a coaxing smile, such as she would have assumed in dealing with a fractious child.

"No," said Edith, with quiet decision, "I shall never forgive either of you for your sin against me—it is beyond pardon."

"Ah! I will not intercede for myself—but think how Emil loves you," pleaded her companion.

"You should have said, 'think how he loves himself,' madam," Edith rejoined, with a scornful curl of her lips, "for nothing but the rankest selfishness could ever have led a person to commit an act of such duplicity and sacrilege as that which he and you adopted to secure your own ends. He does not desire to be pardoned. His only desire is that I should relent and yield to him—which I never shall do."

As she uttered these last words, she emphasized them with a decided little gesture of her left hand that betrayed a relentless purpose.

"Ah!" she cried, the next moment, with a start, the movement having attracted

her eye to the ring upon her third finger, which until that moment she had entirely forgotten.

With a shiver of repulsion, she snatched it off and tossed it into the lap of her companion.

"Take it back to him," she said. "I had forgotten I had it on; I despise myself for having worn it even until now."

Madam flushed angrily at her act and words.

"You are very hard—you are very obdurate," she said, sharply.

"Very well; you can put whatever construction you choose upon the stand I have taken, but do not for a moment deceive yourself by imagining that I will ever consent to be known as Emil Correlli's wife; death would be preferable!" Edith calmly responded.

"Most girls would only be too eager and proud to assume the position—they would be sincerely grateful for the luxuries and pleasures they would enjoy as my brother's wife," Mrs. Goddard coldly remarked, but with an angry gleam in her eyes.

A little smile of contempt curled the corners of Edith's red mouth; but otherwise she did not deign to notice these boasting comments, a circumstance which so enraged her companion that she felt, for a moment, like strangling the girl there and then.

But there was far more to be considered than her own personal feelings, and she felt obliged to curb herself for the time.

If scandal was to be avoided, she must leave no inducement untried to bend Edith's stubborn will, and madam herself was too proud to contemplate anything so humiliating; she was willing to do or bear almost anything to escape becoming a target for the fashionable world to shoot their arrows of ridicule at.

"Edith, I beg that you will listen to me," she earnestly pleaded, after a few moments of thought. "This thing is done and cannot be undone, and now I want you to be reasonable and think of the advantages which, as Emil's wife, you may enjoy. You are a poor girl, without home or friends, and obliged to work for your living. There is an escape from all this if you will be tractable; you can have a beautiful house elegantly furnished, horses, carriages, diamonds, and velvets—in

fact, not a wish you choose to express ungratified. You may travel the world over, if you desire, with no other object in view than to enjoy yourself. On the other hand, if you refuse, there will be no end of scandal—you will ruin the reputation of our whole family—Emil will become the butt of everybody's scorn and ridicule. I shall never be able to show my face again in society, either in Boston or New York; and my husband, who has always occupied a high position, will be terribly shocked and humiliated."

Edith listened quietly to all that she had to say, not once attempting to interrupt her; but when madam finally paused, in expectation of a reply, she simply remarked:

"You should have thought of all this, madam, before you plotted for the ruin of my life; I am not responsible for the consequences of your treachery and crime."

"Crime! that is an ugly word," tartly cried Mrs. Goddard, who began to find the tax upon her patience almost greater than she could bear.

"Nevertheless, it is the correct term to apply to what you have done—it is what I shall charge you with—"

"What! do you dare to tell me that you intend to appeal to the courts?" exclaimed madam, aghast.

She had fondly imagined that, the deed once done, the girl having no friends whose protection she could claim, would make the best of it, and gracefully yield to the situation.

"That is what I intend to do."

Anna Goddard's face was almost livid at this intrepid response.

"And you utterly refuse to listen to reason?" she inquired, struggling hard for self-control.

"I utterly refuse to be known as Emil Correlli's wife, if that is what you mean by 'reason,'" said Edith, calmly.

"Girl! girl! take care—do not try my patience too far," cried her companion, with a flash of passion, "or we may have to resort to desperate measures with you."

"Such as what, if you please?" inquired Edith, still unmoved.

"That remains to be seen; but I warn you that you are bringing only wrath upon your own head. We shall never allow you to create a scandal—we shall find a way to compel you to do as we wish."

"That you can never do!" and the beautiful girl proudly faced the woman with such an undaunted air and look that she involuntarily quailed before her. "It is my nature," she went on, after a slight pause, "to be gentle and yielding in all things reasonable, and when I am kindly treated; but injustice and treachery, such as you have been guilty of, always arouse within me a spirit which a thousand like you and your brother could never bend nor break."

"Do not be too sure, my pretty young Tartar," retorted madam, with a disagreeable sneer.

"I rejected Monsieur Correlli's proposals to me some weeks ago," Edith resumed, without heeding the rude interruption. "I made him clearly understand, and you also, that I could never marry him. You appeared to accept the situation only to scheme for my ruin; but, even though you have tricked me into compromising myself in the presence of many witnesses, it was only a trick, and therefore no legal marriage. At least I do not regard myself as morally bound; and, as I have said before, I shall appeal to the courts to annul whatever tie there may be supposed to exist. This is my irrevocable decision—nothing can change it—nothing will ever swerve me a hair's breadth from it. Go tell your brother, and then let me alone—I will never renew the subject with either of you."

And as Edith ceased she turned her resolute face to the window, and Anna Goddard knew that she had meant every word that she had uttered.

She was amazed by this show of spirit and decision.

The girl had always been a perfect model of gentleness and kindness, ready to do whatever was required of her, obliging and invariably sweet-tempered.

She could hardly realize that the cold, determined, defiant, undaunted sentences to which she had just listened could have fallen from the lips of the mild, quiet Edith whom she had hitherto known.

But, as may be imagined, such an attitude from one who had been a servant to her was not calculated to soothe her ruffled feelings, and after the first flash of astonishment, anger got the better of her.

"Do you imagine you can defy us thus?" she cried, laying an almost brutal grip

upon the girl's arm, as she arose to abandon, for the time, her apparently fruitless task. "No, indeed! You will find to your cost that you have stronger wills than your own to cope with."

With these hot words, Anna Goddard swept angrily from the room, leaving her victim alone.



## **CHAPTER XIX.**

## **"I WILL NEVER BREAK BREAD WITH YOU, AT ANY TABLE."**

As the door closed after the angry and baffled woman, the portly form of the housekeeper entered the room from an apartment adjoining, where, as had been previously arranged between Edith and herself, she had been stationed to overhear the whole of the foregoing conversation.

"What can I do?" sighed the young girl, wearily, and lifting an anxious glance to her companion; for, in spite of her apparent calmness throughout the recent interview, it had been a terrible strain upon her already shattered nerves.

"Nothing just yet, dear, but to try and get well and strong as soon as possible," cheerfully responded Mrs. Weld.

"Did you hear how she threatened me?"

"Yes, but her threats were only so many idle words—they cannot harm you; you need not fear them."

"But I do; somehow, I am impressed that they are plotting even greater wrongs against me," sighed Edith, who, now that the necessity of preserving a bold front was passed, seemed to lose her courage.

"They will not dare—" began Mrs. Weld, with some excitement. Then, suddenly checking herself, she added, soothingly: "But do not worry any more about it now, child—you never need 'cross a bridge until you come it.' Lie down and rest a while; it will do you good, and maybe you will catch a little nap, while I go down to see that everything is moving smoothly in the dining-room and kitchen."

Edith was only too willing to heed this sensible advice, and, shortly after the housekeeper's departure, fell into a restful sleep.

She did not awake until it was nearly dark, when, feeling much refreshed, she arose and dressed herself resolving that she would not trouble tired Mrs. Weld to bring up her dinner, but go downstairs and have it with her, as usual.

The house was very quiet, for, all the guests having gone, there was only the

family and the servants in the house.

Edith remained in her room until she heard the dinner-bell ring, when she went to the door to listen for Mr. and Mrs. Goddard and Emil Correlli to go down, before she ventured forth, for she had a special object in view.

Presently she heard them enter the dining-room, whereupon she stole softly down after them and slipped into the library in search of the daily papers.

She found one, the *Transcript*, and then hurried back to her room, lighted the gas, and sat down to read.

Immediately a low cry of dismay burst from her, for the first thing that caught her eye were some conspicuous head-lines announcing:

"A STARTLING SURPRISE IN HIGH LIFE."

These were followed by a vivid description of the festivities at the Goddard mansion in Wyoming, on the previous evening, mentioning the "unique and original drama," which had wound up with "the great surprise" in the form of a "*bona fide*" marriage between the brother of the beautiful and accomplished hostess, Mrs. Goddard, and a lovely girl to whom the gentleman had long been attached, and whom he had taken this opportune and very novel way of introducing to his friends and society in general.

Then there followed a *résumé* of the play, giving the names of the various actors, an account of the fine scenery and brilliant costumes, etc.

The appearance of the masked bride and groom was then enlarged upon, an accurate description of the bride's elegant dress given, and a most flattering mention made of her beauty and grace, together with the perfect dignity and repose of manner with which she bore her introduction to the many friends of her husband during the reception that followed immediately after the ceremony.

No mention was made of her having fainted afterward, and the article concluded with a flattering tribute to the host and hostess for the success of their "Winter Frolic," which ended so delightfully in the brilliant and long-to-be-remembered ball.

Edith's face was full of pain and indignation after reading this sensational account.



She was sure that the affair had been written up by either madam or her brother, for the express purpose of bringing her more conspicuously before the public, and with the intention of fastening more securely the chain that bound her to the villain who had so wronged her.

"Oh, it is a plot worthy to be placed on record with the intrigues of the Court of France during the reign of Louis the Thirteenth and Richelieu!" Edith exclaimed. "But in this instance they have mistaken the character of their victim," she continued, throwing back her proud little head with an air of defiance, "for I will never yield to them; I will never acknowledge, by word or act, the tie which they claim binds me to him, and I will leave no effort untried to break it. Heavens! what a daring, what an atrocious wrong it was!" she exclaimed, with a shudder of repugnance; "and I am afraid that, aside from my own statements, I cannot bring one single fact to prove a charge of fraud against either of them."

She fell into a painful reverie, mechanically folding the paper as she sat rocking slowly back and forth trying to think of some way of escape from her unhappy situation.

But, at last, knowing that it was about time for Mrs. Weld to have her dinner, she arose to go down to join her.

As she did so the paper slipped from her hands to the floor.

She stooped to pick it up when an item headed, in large letters "Personal" caught her eye.

Without imagining that it could have any special interest for her, she glanced in an aimless way over it.

Suddenly every nerve was electrified.

"What is this?" she exclaimed, and read the paragraph again.

The following was the import of it:

"If Miss Allandale, who disappeared so suddenly from New York, on the 13th of last December, will call upon or send her address to Bryant & Co., Attorneys, No. — Broadway, she will learn of something greatly to her advantage in a financial way."

"How very strange! What can it mean?" murmured the astonished girl, the rich

color mounting to her brow as she realized that Royal Bryant must have inserted this "personal" in the paper in the hope that it would meet her eye.

"Who in the world is there to feel interested in me or my financial condition?" she continued, with a look of perplexity.

At first it occurred to her that Mr. Bryant might have taken this way to ascertain where she was from personal motives; but she soon discarded this thought, telling herself that he would never be guilty of practicing deception in any way to gain his ends. If he had simply desired her address he would have asked for that alone without the promise of any pecuniary reward.

She stood thinking the matter over for several moments.

At last her face cleared and a look of resolution flashed into her eyes.

"I will do it!" she murmured, "I will go back at once to New York—I will ascertain what this advertisement means, then I will tell him all that has happened to me here, and ask him if there is any way by which I can be released from this dreadful situation, into which I have been trapped. I am sure he will help me, if any one can."

A faint, tender smile wreathed her lips as she mused thus, and recalled her last interview with Royal Bryant; his fond, eager words when he told her of her complete vindication at the conclusion of her trial in New York—of his tender look and hand-clasp when he bade her good-by at the door of the carriage that bore her home to her mother.

She began to think that she had perhaps not used him quite fairly in running away and hiding herself thus from him who had been so true a friend to her; and yet, if she remained in his employ, and he had asked her to be his wife, she knew that she must either have refused him, without giving him a sufficient reason, or else confessed to him her shameful origin.

"It would have been better, perhaps, if I had never come away," she sighed, "still it is too late now to regret it, and all I can do is to comply with the request of this 'personal.' I would leave this very night, only there are some things at the other house that I must take with me. But to-morrow night I will go, and I shall have to steal away, or they will find some way to prevent my going. I will not even tell dear Mrs. Weld, although she has been so kind to me; but I will write and explain it all to her after my arrival in New York."

Having settled this important matter in her mind, Edith went quietly downstairs, and returned the paper to the library, after which she repaired to the tiny room where she and Mrs. Weld were in the habit of taking their meals.

The kind-hearted woman chided her for coming down two flights of stairs, while she was still so weak; but Edith assured her that she really began to feel quite like herself again, and could not think of allowing her to wait upon her when she was so weary from her own numerous duties.

They had a pleasant chat over their meal, the young girl appearing far more cheerful than one would have naturally expected under existing circumstances. She flushed with painful embarrassment, however, when a servant came in to wait upon them, and gave her a stare of undisguised astonishment, which plainly told her that he thought her place was in the dining-room with the family.

She understood by it that all the servants knew what had occurred the previous night, and believed her to be the wife of Emil Correlli.

But nothing else occurred to mar the meal, and when it was finished Edith started to go up to her room again.

She went up the back way, hoping thus to avoid meeting any member of the family.

She reached the landing upon the second floor and was about to mount another flight when there came a swift step over the front stairs, and, before she could escape, Emil Correlli came into view.

Another instant and he was by her side.

"Edith!" he exclaimed, astonished to see her there, "where have you been?"

"Down to my dinner," she quietly replied, but confronting him with undaunted bearing.

"Down to your dinner?" he repeated, flushing hotly, a look of keen annoyance sweeping over his face. "If you were able to leave your room at all, your place was in the dining-room, with the family, and," he added, sternly, "I do not wish any gossip among the servants regarding my—wife."

It was Edith's turn to flush now, at that obnoxious term.

"You will please spare me all allusion to that mockery," she bitterly, but

haughtily, retorted.

"It was no mockery—it was a *bona fide* marriage," he returned. "You are my lawful wife, and I wish you, henceforth, to occupy your proper position as such."

"I am not your wife. I shall never acknowledge, by word or act, any such relationship toward you," she calmly, but decidedly, responded.

"Oh, yes you will."

"Never!"

"But you have already done so, and there are hundreds of people who can prove it," he answered, hotly, but with an air of triumph.

"It will be a comparatively easy matter to make public a true statement of the case," said the girl, looking him straight in the eyes.

"You will not dare set idle tongues gossiping by repudiating our union!" exclaimed the young man, fiercely.

"I should dare anything that would set me free from you," was the dauntless response.

Her companion gnashed his teeth with rage.

"You would find very few who would believe your statements," he said; "for, besides the fact that hundreds witnessed the ceremony last night, the papers have published full accounts of the affair, and the whole city now knows about it."

"I know it—I have read the papers," said Edith, without appearing in the least disconcerted.

"What! already?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did you think of the account?" her companion inquired, regarding her curiously.

"That it was simply another clever piece of duplicity on your part, the only object of which was the accomplishment of your nefarious purposes. I believe you yourself were the author of it."

Emil Correlli started as if he had been stung.

He did not dream that she would attribute the article to him—the last thing he could wish would be that she should think it had emanated from his pen.

Nevertheless, his admiration for her was increased tenfold by her shrewdness in discerning the truth.

"You judge me harshly," he said, bitterly.

"I have no reason for judging you otherwise," Edith coldly remarked; then added, haughtily: "Allow me to pass, sir, if you please."

"I do not please. Oh, Edith, pray be reasonable; come into Anna's boudoir, and let us talk this matter over amicably and calmly," he pleaded, laying a gentle hand upon her arm.

She shook it off as if it had been a reptile.

"No, sir; I shall discuss nothing with you, either now or at any other time. If," she added, a fiery gleam in her beautiful eyes, "it is ever discussed in my presence it will be before a judge and jury!"

The man bit his lips to repress an oath.

"Yes, Anna told me you threatened that; but I hoped it was only an idle menace," he said. "Do you really mean that you intend to file an application to have the marriage annulled?"

"Most assuredly—at least, if, indeed, after laying the matter before the proper authorities, such a formality is deemed necessary," said the girl, with a scornful inflection that cut her listener to the quick.

He grew deadly white, more at her contemptuous tones than her threat.

"Edith—what can I say to win you?" he cried, after a momentary struggle with himself. "I swear to you that I cannot—will not live without you. I will be your slave—your lightest wish shall be my law, if you will yield this point—come with me as my honored wife, and let me, by my love and unceasing efforts, try to win even your friendly regard. I know I have done wrong," he went on, assuming a tone and air of humility; "I see it now when it is too late. I ask you to pardon me, and let me atone in whatever way you may deem best. See!—I kneel—I beg—I implore!"

And suiting the action to the words, he dropped upon one knee before her and extended his hands in earnest appeal to her.

"In whatever way I may deem best you will atone?" she repeated, looking him gravely in the face. "Then make a public confession of the fraud of which you have been guilty, and give me my freedom."

"Ah, anything but that—anything but that!" he exclaimed, flushing consciously beneath her gaze.

She moved back a pace or two from him, her lips curling with contempt.

"Your appeal was but a wretched farce—it is worse than useless—it is despicable," she said, with an accent that made him writhe like a whipped cur.

"Will nothing move you?" he passionately cried.

"Nothing."

"By Heaven! then I will meet you blade to blade!" he cried, furiously, and springing to his feet, his eyes blazing with passion. "If entreaties will not move you—if neither bribes nor promises will cause you to yield—we will try what lawful authority will do. I have no intention of being made the laughing stock of the world, I assure you; and, hereafter, I command that you conduct yourself in a manner becoming the position which I have given you. In the first place, then, to-morrow morning, you will breakfast in the dining-room with the family—do you hear?"

Edith had stood calmly regarding him during this speech; but, wishing him to go on, if he had anything further to say, she did not attempt to reply as he paused after the above question.

"Immediately after breakfast," he resumed, with something less of excitement, and not feeling very comfortable beneath her unwavering glance, "we shall return to the city, and the following morning you and I will start for St. Augustine, Florida—thence go to California and later to Europe."

The young girl straightened herself to her full height, and she had never seemed more lovely than at that moment.

"Monsieur Correlli," she said, in a voice that rang with an irrevocable decision, "I shall never go to Florida with you, nor yet to California, neither to Europe; I

shall never appear anywhere with you in public, neither will I ever break bread with you, at any table. There, sir, you have my answer to your 'commands.' Now, let me pass."

Without waiting to see what effect her remarks might have upon him, she pushed resolutely by him and went swiftly upstairs to her room.

The man gazed after her in undisguised astonishment.

"By St. Michael! the girl has a tremendous spirit in that slight frame of hers. She has always seemed such a sweet little angel, too—no one would have suspected it. However, there are more ways than one to accomplish my purpose, and I flatter myself that I shall yet conquer her."

With this comforting reflection, he sought his sister, to relate what had occurred, and enlist her crafty talents in planning his next move in the desperate game he was playing.



## **CHAPTER XX.**



## **EDITH RESOLVES TO MEET HER ENEMIES WITH THEIR OWN WEAPONS.**

The morning following her interview with Emil Correlli, when Edith attempted to leave her room to go down to breakfast, she found, to her dismay, that her door had been fastened on the outside.

An angry flush leaped to her brow.

"So they imagine they can make me bend to their will by making a prisoner of me, do they?" she exclaimed, with flashing eyes and scornful lips. "We shall see!"

But she was powerless just then to help herself, and so was obliged to make the best of her situation for the present.

Presently some one knocked upon her door, and she heard a bolt moved—it having been placed there during the night. Then Mrs. Goddard appeared before her, smiling a gracious good-morning, and bearing a tray, upon which there was a daintily arranged breakfast.

"We thought it best for you to eat here, since you do not feel like coming down to the dining-room," she kindly remarked, as she set the tray upon the table.

Edith opened her lips to make some scathing retort; but, a bright thought suddenly flashing through her mind, she checked herself, and replied, appreciatively:

"Thank you, Mrs. Goddard."

The woman turned a surprised look upon her, for she had expected only tears and reproaches from her because of her imprisonment.

But Edith, without appearing to notice it, sat down and quietly prepared to eat her breakfast.

"Ah! she is beginning to come around," thought the wily woman.

But, concealing her secret pleasure at this change in her victim, she remarked, in

her ordinary tone:

"We shall leave for the city very soon after breakfast, so please have everything ready so as not to keep the horses standing in the cold."

"Everything is ready now," said Edith, glancing at her trunk, which she had locked just before trying the door.

"That is well, and I will send for you when the carriage comes around."

Edith simply bowed to show that she heard, and then her companion retired, locking the door after her, but marveling at the girl's apparent submission.

"There is no way to outwit rogues except with their own weapons—cunning and deceit," murmured the fair prisoner, bitterly, as she began to eat her breakfast. "I will be very wary and apparently submissive until I have matured my plans, and then they may chew their cud of defeat as long as it pleases them to do so."

After finishing her meal she dressed herself for the coming drive, but wondered why Mrs. Weld had not been up to see her, for, of course, she must know that something unusual had happened, or that she was ill again, since she had not joined her at breakfast.

A little later she heard a stealthy step outside her door, and the next moment an envelope was slipped beneath it into her room; then the steps retreated, and all was still again.

Rising, Edith picked up the missive and opened it, when another sealed envelope, addressed to her, in a beautiful, lady-like hand, and postmarked Boston, was revealed, together with a brief note hastily written with a pencil.

This latter proved to be from Mrs. Weld.

"Dear Child," it ran, "I have been requested not to go to you this morning, as you are particularly engaged, which, of course, I understand as a command to keep out of the way. But I want you to know that I mean to stand by you, and shall do all in my power to help you. I shall manage to see or write to you again in a day or two. Meantime, don't lose heart.

"Affectionately yours,

"GERTRUDE WELD.

"P.S.—The inclosed letter came for you in last night's mail. I captured it for you."

With an eager light in her eyes, Edith opened it and read:

"Boston, Feb. —,  
18—.

"MY DEAR MISS ALLEN:—I have learned of the wretched deception that has been practiced upon you, and hasten to write this to assure you that my previous offer of friendship—when we met at the time of the accident to my coachman—was not a mere matter of form. Again I say, if you need a friend, come to me, and I will do my utmost to shield you from those who have shown themselves your worst enemies, and whom I know to be unworthy of the position which they occupy in the social world. Come to me when you will, and I promise to protect you from them. I cannot say more upon paper.

"Sincerely yours,

ISABEL STEWART."

"How very kind, and yet how very strange!" murmured Edith, as she refolded the letter. "I wonder who could have told her about that wretched affair of Tuesday evening. I wonder, too, what she knows about the Goddards, and if I had better accept her friendly offer."

She reflected upon the matter for a few minutes, and then continued:

"I think I will go to New York first, as I had planned, see what Mr. Bryant can do for me, and ascertain the meaning of that strange personal; then I think I will come back and ask her to take me as a companion—for I do not believe that what I shall learn to my financial advantage will amount to enough to preclude the necessity of my doing something for my support. I suppose I ought to answer this letter, though," she added, meditatively; "but I believe I shall not dare to until I am safely away from Boston, for if my reply should fall into the hands of any member of this family, my plans might be frustrated."

She carefully concealed both notes about her person, and then sat down to await orders to go below.

A little later Mrs. Goddard came to her and said they were about ready to leave for the city, and requested her to go down into the hall.

Edith arose with apparent alacrity, and madam noticed with an expression of satisfaction that her bearing was less aggressive than when they had last met.

She followed Mrs. Goddard downstairs and seated herself in the hall to await the signal for departure.

Presently Mr. Goddard came in from outdoors.

He started slightly upon seeing Edith, then paused and inquired kindly if she was feeling quite well again.

Edith thanked him, and briefly remarked that she was, when he startled her by stooping suddenly and whispering in her ear:

"Count upon me as your friend, my child; I promise you that I will do all in my power to help you thwart your enemies."

He waited for no answer, but passed quickly on and entered the library.

Edith was astonished, and while, for the moment, she was touched by his unexpected offer of assistance, she at the same time distrusted him.

"I will trust myself and my fate with no one but Royal Bryant," she said to herself, a flush of excitement rising to her cheek.

A few minutes later the carriage was driven to the door—the snow having become so soft they were obliged to return to the city on wheels—when Mrs. Goddard came hurrying from the dining-room, where she had been giving some last orders to the servants, and bidding Edith follow her, passed out of the house and entered the carriage.

Edith was scarcely seated beside her when Emil Correlli made his appearance and settled himself opposite her.

The young girl flushed, but, schooling herself to carry out the part which she had determined to assume for the present, made no other sign to betray how distasteful his presence was to her.

She could not, however, bring herself to join in any conversation, except, once or twice, to respond to a direct question from madam, although the young man tried

several times to draw her out, until, finally discouraged, he relapsed into a sullen and moody silence, greatly to the disgust of his sister, who seemed nervously inclined to talk.

Upon their arrival in town, Mrs. Goddard remarked to Edith:

"I have been obliged to take, for a servant, the room you used to occupy, dear; consequently, you will have to go into the south chamber for the present. Thomas," turning to a man and pointing to Edith's trunk, "take this trunk directly up to the south chamber."

Edith's heart gave a startled bound at this unexpected change.

The "south chamber" was the handsomest sleeping apartment in the house—the guest chamber, in fact—and she understood at once why it had thus been assigned to her.

It was intended that she should pose and be treated in every respect as became the wife of madam's brother, and thus the best room in the house had been set apart for her use.

She knew that it would be both useless and unwise to make any objections; the change had been determined upon, and doubtless her old room was already occupied by a servant, to prevent the possibility of her returning to it.

Thus, after the first glance of surprise at madam, she turned and quietly followed the man who was taking up her trunk.

But, on entering the "south chamber," another surprise awaited her, for the apartment had been fitted up with even greater luxury than previous to their leaving for the country.

The man unstrapped her trunk and departed, when Edith looked around her with a flushed and excited face.

A beautiful little rocker, of carved ivory, inlaid with gold, was standing in the bay-window overlooking the avenue, and beside it there was an exquisite work-stand to match.

An elegant writing-desk, of unique design, and furnished with everything a lady of the daintiest tastes could desire, stood near another sunny window. The inkstand, paper weight, and blotter were of silver; the pen of gold, with a costly

pearl handle.

There were several styles of paper and envelopes, and all stamped in gilt with a monogram composed of the initials E. C., and there was a tiny box of filigree silver filled with postage stamps.

It was an outfit to make glad the heart of almost any beauty-loving girl; but Edith's eyes flashed with angry scorn the moment she caught sight of the dainty monogram, wrought in gold, upon the paper and envelopes.

On the dressing-case there was a full set of toilet and manicure utensils, in solid silver, and also marked with the same initials; besides these there were exquisite bottles of cut glass, with gold stoppers filled with various kinds of perfumery.

Upon the bed there lay an elegant sealskin garment, which, at a glance, Edith knew must have been cut to fit her figure, and beside it there was a pretty muff and a Parisian hat that could not have cost less than thirty dollars, while over the foot-board there hung three or four beautiful dresses.

"Did they suppose that they could buy me over—tempt me to sell myself for this gorgeous finery?" the indignant girl exclaimed, in a voice that quivered with anger. "They must think me very weak-minded and variable if they did."

But her curiosity was excited to see how far they had carried their extravagant bribery; and, going back to the dressing-case, she drew out the upper drawer.

Notwithstanding her indignation and scorn, she could not suppress a cry of mingled astonishment and admiration at what she saw there, for the receptacle contained the daintiest lingerie imaginable.

There were beautiful laces, handkerchiefs, and gloves, suitable for every occasion; three or four fans of costly material and exquisite workmanship; a pair of pearl-and-gold opera glasses.

More than this, and arranged so as to cunningly tempt the eye, there were several cases of jewels—comprising pearls, diamonds, emeralds, and rubies.

It was an array to tempt the most obdurate heart and fancy, and Edith stood gazing upon the lovely things with admiring eyes while, after a moment, a little sigh of regret accompanied her resolute act of shutting the drawer and turning the key in its lock.

The second and third contained several suits of exquisite underwear of finest material, and comprising everything that a lady could need or desire in that line; in the fourth drawer there were boxes of silken hose of various colors, together with lovely French boots and slippers suitable for different costumes.

"What a pity to spend so much money for nothing," Edith murmured, regretfully, when she had concluded her inspection. "It is very evident that they look upon me as a silly, vacillating girl, who can be easily managed and won over by pretty clothes and glittering baubles. I suppose there are girls whose highest ambition in life is to possess such things, and to lead an existence of luxury and pleasure—who would doubtless sell themselves for them; but I should hate and scorn myself for accepting anything of the kind from a man whom I could neither respect nor love."

She gave utterance to a heavy sigh as she closed the drawer and turned away from the dressing-case; not, however, because she longed to possess the beautiful things she had seen, but in view of the difficulties which might lie before her to hamper her movements in the effort to escape from her enemies.

"I suppose I must remain here for a few hours at least," she continued, an expression of anxiety flitting over her face, "and if I expect to carry out my plans successfully I must begin by assuming a submissive role."

She removed her hat and wraps, hanging them in a closet; then, going to her trunk, she selected what few articles she would absolutely need on her journey to New York, and some important papers—among them the letters which her own mother had written—and after hastily making them up into a neat package, returned them again to the trunk for concealment, until she should be ready to leave the house.

This done, she sat down by a window to await and meet, with what fortitude she could command, the next act in the drama of her life.

Not long after she heard a step in the hall, then there came a knock on her door, and madam's voice called out:

"It is only I, Edith; may I come in?"

"Yes, come," unhesitatingly responded the girl, and Mrs. Goddard, her face beaming with smiles and good nature, entered the room.

"How do you like your new quarters, dear?" she inquired, searching Edith's fair

face with eager eyes.

"Of course, everything is very beautiful," she returned, glancing admiringly around the apartment.

"And are you pleased with the additions to the furnishings?—the chair, the work-table, and writing-desk?"

"I have never seen anything more lovely," Edith replied, bending forward as if to examine more closely the filigree stamp box on the desk, but in reality to conceal the flush of scorn that leaped into her eyes.

"I knew you would like them," said madam, with a little note of triumph in her voice; "they are exquisite, and Emil is going to have them carefully packed, and take them along for you to use wherever you stop in your travels. And the cloak and dresses—aren't they perfectly elegant? The jewels, too, and other things in the dressing-case; have you seen them?"

"Yes, I have seen them all; but—but I am very sorry that so much money should have been spent for me," Edith faltered, a hot flush, which her companion interpreted as one of pleasure and gratified vanity, suffusing her cheeks.

"Oh, the money is of no account, if you are only happy," Mrs. Goddard lightly remarked. "And now," she went on eagerly, "I want you to dress yourself just as nicely as you can, and be ready, when the bell rings, to come down to lunch, as it becomes—my sister. Will you, dear?" she concluded, coaxingly. "Do, Edith, be reasonable; let us bury the hatchet, and all be on good terms."

"I—I do not think I can quite make up my mind to go down to lunch," Edith faltered, with averted face.

Madam frowned; she had begun to think her victory was won, and the disappointment nettled her. But she controlled herself and remarked pleasantly:

"Well, then, I will send up your lunch, if you will promise to come down and dine with us, will you?"

Edith hesitated a moment; then, drawing a long breath, she remarked, as if with bashful hesitancy:

"I think, perhaps—I will go down later—by and by."

"Now you are beginning to be sensible, dear," said madam, flashing a covert



look of exultation at her, "and Emil will be so happy. Put on this silver-gray silk—it is so lovely, trimmed with white lace—and the pearls; you will be charming in the costume. I am sorry I have to go directly after lunch," she continued, regretfully, "but I have a call to make, and shall not be back for a couple of hours; but Emil will be here; so if you can find it in your heart to be a little kind to him, just put on the gray silk—or anything else you may prefer—and go down to him. May I tell him that you will?"

"I will not promise—at least until after you return," murmured Edith, in a low voice.

Madam could have laughed in triumph, for she believed the victory was hers.

"Well, perhaps you would feel a trifle shy about it," she said, good-naturedly, "it would be pleasanter and easier for you, no doubt, if I were here, so I will come for you when I get back. Good-by, till then."

And with a satisfied little nod and smile, madam left her and went downstairs to tell her brother that his munificence had won the day, and he would have no further trouble with a fractious bride.



## **CHAPTER XXI.**

## **A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER PAYS EDITH AN UNEXPECTED VISIT.**

Edith listened until she heard madam descend the stairs, when she sprang to her feet in a fever of excitement.

"Oh, how I hate myself for practicing even that much of deceit!" she bitterly exclaimed; "to allow her to think for a moment that I have been won over by those baubles. Although I told her no lie, I do intend to go down by and by if I can see an opportunity to get out of the house. But I did so long to stand boldly up and repudiate her proposals and all these costly bribes. Dress myself in those things!" she continued, with a scornful glance toward the bed; "make myself look 'pretty and nice,' with the price of my self-respect, and then go down to flaunt before the man who has grossly insulted me by assuming that he could bribe me to submission! I would rather be clothed in rags—the very sight of these things makes me sick at heart."

She turned resolutely from them, and, drawing the stiffest and hardest chair in the room to a window, sat down with her back to the allurements around her and gazed out upon the street.

She remained there until her lunch was sent up, when she ate enough to barely satisfy her hunger, after which she went back to her post to watch for the departure of Mrs. Goddard.

The house stood upon a corner, and thus faced upon two streets—the avenue in front, and at the side a cross-street that led through to Beacon street. Thus, Edith's room being upon the front of the mansion, she had a wide outlook in two directions.

Not long after stationing herself at the window, she saw Mrs. Goddard go out, and then she began to wonder how she could manage to make her escape before her return.

She knew that she was only a prisoner in the house, in spite of the fact that her door was not locked; that Emil Correlli had been left below simply to act as her keeper; and, should she make the slightest attempt to escape, he would immediately intercept her.

She could not get out of the house except by the front way, and to do this she would have to pass down a long flight of stairs and by two or three rooms, in any one of which Emil Correlli might be on the watch in anticipation of this very proceeding.

There was a back stairway; but as this led directly up from the area hall, the door at the bottom was always carefully kept locked—the key hanging on a concealed nail for fear of burglars; and Edith, knowing this, did not once think of attempting to go out that way.

While she sat by the window, trying to think of some way out of her difficulties, her attention was attracted by the peculiar movements of a woman on the opposite side of the street—it was the side street leading through to Beacon.

She was of medium height, richly clad in a long seal garment, but heavily veiled, and she was leading a little child, of two or three years, by the hand.

But for her strange behavior, Edith would have simply thought her to be some young mother, who was giving her little one an airing on that pleasant winter afternoon. She appeared very anxious to shun observation, dropping her head whenever any one passed her, and sometimes turning abruptly around to avoid the gaze of the curious.

She never entirely passed the house, but walked back and forth again and again from the corner to a point opposite the area door near the rear of the dwelling, while she eagerly scanned every window, as if seeking for a glimpse of some one whom she knew. Moreover, from time to time, her eyes appeared to rest curiously upon Edith, whom she could plainly perceive at her post above.

For nearly half an hour she kept this up; then, suddenly crossing the street, disappeared within the area entrance to the house, greatly to the surprise of our fair heroine.

"How very strange!" Edith remarked, in astonishment. "She is certainly too richly clad to be the friend of any of the servants, and if she desires to see Mrs. Goddard, why did she not go to the front entrance and ring?"

While she was pondering the singular incident, she saw the gas-man emerge from the same door, and pass down the street toward another house; then her mind reverted again to her own precarious situation, and she forgot about the intruder and her child below.

The house was very still—there was not even a servant moving about to disturb the almost uncanny silence that reigned throughout it. It was Thursday, and Edith knew that the housemaid and cook's assistant were to have that afternoon out, which, doubtless, accounted in a measure for the unusual quiet.

But this very fact she knew would only serve to make any movement on her part all the more noticeable, and while she was wondering how she should manage her escape before the return of Mrs. Goddard, a slight noise behind her suddenly warned her of the presence of another in the room.

She turned quickly, and a low cry of surprise broke from her as she saw standing, just inside the door, the very woman whom, a few moments before she had seen disappear within the area door of the house.

She was now holding her child in her arms and regarding Edith through her veil with a look of fire and hatred that made the girl's flesh creep with a sense of horror.

Putting the little one down on the floor, she braced herself against the door and remarked, with a bitter sneer, but in a rich, musical voice, and with a foreign accent:

"Without doubt I am in the presence of Madam Correlli."

Edith flushed crimson at her words.

"I—I do not understand you," she faltered, filled with surprise and dismay at being thus addressed by the veiled stranger.

"I wish to see Madam Correlli," the woman remarked, in an impatient and bitter tone. "I am sure I am not mistaken addressing you thus."

"Yes, you are mistaken—there is no such person," Edith boldly replied, determined that she would never commit herself by responding to that hated name.

"Are you not the girl whose name was Edith Allen?" demanded her companion, sharply.

"My name is Edith Allen—"

She checked herself suddenly, for she had unwittingly come near uttering the rest of it. She went a step or two nearer the woman, trying to distinguish her features,

which were so shadowed by the veil she wore that she could not tell how she looked.

"Ah! so you will admit your identity, but you will not confess to the name by which I have addressed you. Why?" demanded the unknown visitor, with a sneer.

"Because I do not choose," said Edith, coldly. "Who are you, and why have you forced yourself upon me thus?"

"And you will also deny this?" cried the stranger, in tones of repressed passion, but ignoring the girl's questions, as she pulled a paper from her pocket and thrust under her eyes a notice of the marriage at Wyoming.

Edith grew pale at the sight of it, when the other, quick to observe it, laughed softly but derisively.

"Ah, no; you cannot deny that you were married to Emil Correlli, only the night before last, in the presence of many, many people," she said, in a hoarse, passionate whisper. "Do you think you can deceive me? Do you dare to lie to me?"

"I have no wish to deceive you. I would not knowingly utter a falsehood to any one," Edith gravely returned. "I know, of course, to what you refer; but"—throwing back her head with a defiant air—"I will never answer to the name by which you have called me!"

"Ha! say you so! And why?" eagerly exclaimed her companion, regarding her curiously. "Can you deny that you went to the altar with Emil Correlli?" she continued, excitedly. "That a clergyman read the marriage service over you?—that you were afterward introduced to many people as his wife?—and that you are now living under the same roof with him, surrounded by all this luxury"—sweeping her eyes around the room—"for which he has paid?"

"No, I cannot deny it!" said Edith, with a weary sigh. "All that you have read in that paper really happened; but—"

"Aha! Well, but what?" interposed the woman, with a malicious sneer that instantly aroused all Edith's spirit.

"Pardon me," she said, drawing herself proudly erect and speaking with offended dignity, "but I cannot understand what right you, an utter stranger to me, have to intrude upon me thus. Who are you, madam, and why have you forced yourself

here to question me in such a dictatorial manner?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" The mirthless laugh was scarcely audible, but it was replete with a bitterness that made Edith shiver with a nameless horror. "Who am I, indeed? Let me assure you that I am one who would never take the stand that you have just taken; who would never refuse to be known as the wife of Emil Correlli, or to be called by his name if I could but have the right to such a position. Look at me!" she commanded, tearing the veil from her face. "We have met before."

Edith beheld her, and was amazed, for it needed but a glance to show her that she was the girl who had accosted Emil Correlli on the street that afternoon when he had overtaken and walked home with her after the singular accident and encounter with Mrs. Stewart.

"Aha! and so you know me," the girl went on—for she could not have been a day older than Edith herself, Although there were lines of care and suffering upon her brilliant face—seeking the look of recognition in her eyes; "you remember how I confronted him that day when he was walking with you."

"Yes, I remember; but—"

"But that does not tell you who—or what I am, would perhaps be the better way of putting it," said the stranger, with bitter irony. "Look here; perhaps this will tell you better than any other form of introduction," she added, almost fiercely, as, with one hand, she snatched the cap off her child's head and then turned his face toward Edith.

The startled girl involuntarily uttered a cry of mingled surprise and dismay, for, in face and form and bearing, she beheld—a miniature Emil Correlli!

For a moment she was speechless, thrilled with greater loathing for the man than she had ever before experienced, as a suspicion of the truth flashed through her brain.

Then she lifted her astonished eyes to the woman, to find her regarding her with a look of mingled curiosity, hatred, and triumph.

"The boy is—his child?" Edith murmured at last, in an inquiring tone.

A slow smile crept over the mother's face as she stood for a moment looking at Edith—a smile of malice which betrayed that she gloried in seeing that the girl at last understood her purpose in bringing the little one there.

"Yes, you see—you understand," she said, at last; "any one would know that Correlli is his father."

"And you—" Edith breathed, in a scarcely audible voice, while she began to tremble with a secret hope.

"I am the child's mother—yes," the girl returned, with a look of despair in her dusky orbs.

But she was not prepared for the light of eager joy that leaped into Edith's eyes at this confession—the new life and hope that swept over her face and animated her manner until she seemed almost transformed, from the weary, spiritless appearing girl she had seemed on her entrance, into a new creature.

"Then, of course, you are Emil Correlli's wife," she cried, in a glad tone; "you have come to tell me this—to tell me that I am free from the hateful tie which I supposed bound me to him? Oh, I thank you! I thank you!"

"You thank me?"

"Yes, a thousand times."

"Ha! and you say the tie that binds you to him is hateful?" whispered the strange woman, while she studied Edith's face with mingled wonder and curiosity.

"More hateful than I can express," said Edith, with incisive bitterness.

"And you do not—love him?"

"Love him? Oh, no!"

The tone was too replete with aversion to be doubted.

"Ah, it is I who do not understand now!" exclaimed Edith's visitor, with a look of perplexity.

"Let me tell you," said the young girl, drawing nearer and speaking rapidly. "I was Mrs. Goddard's companion, and quite happy and content with my work until he—her villainous brother—came. Ah, perhaps I shall wound you if I say more," she interposed, and breaking off suddenly, as she saw her companion wince.

"No, no; go on," commanded her guest, imperatively.

"Well, Monsieur Correlli began to make love to me and to persecute me with his



attentions soon after he came here. He proposed marriage to me some weeks ago, and I refused to listen to him—"

"You refused him!"

"Why, yes, certainly; I did not love him; I would not marry any one whom I could not love," Edith replied, with a little scornful curl of her lips at the astonished interruption, which had betrayed that her guest thought no girl could be indifferent to the charms of the man whom she so adored.

"He was offended," Edith resumed, "and insisted that he would not take my refusal as final. When I finally convinced him that I meant what I had said, he and his sister plotted together to accomplish their object, and make me his wife by strategy. Madam planned a winter frolic at her country residence; she wrote the play of which you have an account in that paper; she chose her characters, and it was rehearsed to perfection. At the last moment, on the evening of its presentation before her friends, she removed the two principal characters—telling me that they had been called home by a telegram—and substituted her brother and me in their places. She did not even tell me who was to take the gentleman's place—she simply said a friend; it was all done so hurriedly there was no time, apparently, for explanations. And then—oh! it is too horrible to think of!" interposed Edith, bringing her hands together with a despairing gesture, "she had that ordained minister come on the stage and legally marry us. From beginning to end it was all a fraud!"

"Stop, girl! and swear that you are telling me the truth!" cried her strange companion, as she stepped close to Edith's side, laid a violent hand upon her arm, and searched her face with a look that must have made her shrink and cower if she had been trying to deceive.

"Oh, I would give the world if it were not true!" Edith exclaimed, with an earnestness that could not be doubted—"if the last scene in that drama had never been enacted, or if I could have been warned in time of the treachery of which I was being made the victim!"

"Suppose you had been warned!" demanded her guest, still clutching her arm with painful force, "would you have dared refuse to do their bidding?"

"Would I have dared refuse?" exclaimed Edith, drawing herself haughtily erect. "No power on earth could have made me marry that man."

"I don't know! I don't know! He is rich, handsome, talented," muttered the other, regarding her suspiciously. "Will you swear that it was fraud—that you did not know you were being married to him? Do not try to lie to me," she went on, warningly. "I came here this afternoon with a heart full of bitter hatred toward you; in my soul I believe I was almost a murderess. But—if you also are the victim of a bad man's perfidy, then we have a common cause."

"I have told you only the truth," responded Edith, gravely. "Monsieur Correlli was utterly repulsive to me, and I never could have consented to marry him,

under any circumstances. I know he is considered handsome—I know he is rich and talented; but all that would be no temptation to me—I could never sell myself for fortune or position. I am very sorry if you have been made unhappy because of me," she went on gently; "but I have not willfully wronged you in any way. And if you have come here to tell me that you are Monsieur Correlli's wife, you have saved me from a fate I abhorred—and I shall be—I am free! and I shall bless you as long as I live!"



## **CHAPTER XXII.**

## **"I WILL RISE ABOVE MY SIN AND SHAME!"**

Edith's strange visitor stood contemplating her with a look of mingled perplexity and sadness.

It was evident that she could not understand how any one could be glad to renounce a man like Emil Correlli, with the fortune and position which he could give the woman of his choice.

The two made a striking tableau as they stood there facing each other, with that beautiful child between them; for in style and coloring, they were exactly the opposite of each other.

Edith, so fair and slight, with her delicate features and golden hair, her great innocent blue eyes, graceful bearing, and cultivated manner, which plainly betrayed that she had been reared in an atmosphere of gentleness and refinement.

The other was of a far different type, yet, perhaps, not less striking and beautiful in her way.

She was of medium height, with a full, voluptuous form, a complexion of pale olive, with brilliantly scarlet lips, and eyes like "black diamonds," and hair that had almost a purple tinge in its ebon masses; her features, though far from being regular, were piquant, and when she was speaking lighted into fascinating animation with every passing emotion.

"I shall be free!" Edith murmured again with a long-drawn sigh of relief, "for of course you will assert your claim upon him, and"—with a glance at the child—"he will not dare to deny it."

"You are so anxious to be free? You would bless me for helping you to be free?" repeated her companion, studying the girl's face earnestly, questioningly.

"Ah, yes; I was almost in despair when you came in," Edith replied, shivering, and with starting tears; "now I begin to hope that my life has not been utterly ruined."

Her visitor flushed crimson, and her great black eyes flashed with sudden anger.

"My curse be upon him for all the evil he has done!" she cried, passionately. "Oh! how gladly would I break the bond that binds you to him, but—I have not the power; I have no claim upon him."

Edith regarded her with astonishment.

"No claim upon him?" she repeated, with another glance at the little one who was gazing from one to another with wondering eyes.

The mother's glance followed hers, and an expression of despair swept over her face.

"Oh, Holy Virgin, pity me!" she moaned, a blush of shame mantling her cheeks.

Then lifting her heavy eyes once more to Edith, she continued, falteringly:

"The boy is his and—mine; but—I have no legal claim upon him—I am no wife."

For a moment after this humiliating confession there was an unbroken silence in that elegant room.

Then a hot wave of sympathetic color flashed up to Edith's brow, while a look of tender, almost divine, compassion gleamed in her lovely eyes.

For the time she forgot her own wretchedness in her sympathy for her erring and more unfortunate sister—for the woman and the mother who had been outraged beyond compare.

At length she raised her hand and laid it half-timidly, but with exceeding kindness, upon her shoulder.

"I understand you now," she said, gently, "and I am very sorry."

The words were very simple and commonplace; but the tone, the look, and the gesture that accompanied them spoke more than volumes, and completely won the heart of the passionate and despairing creature before her for all time.

They also proved too much for her self-possession, and, with a moan of anguish, throwing herself upon her knees beside her child, she clasped him convulsively in her arms and burst into a flood of weeping.

"Oh! my poor, innocent baby! to think that this curse must rest upon you all your life—it breaks my heart!" she moaned, while she passionately covered his head

and face with kisses. "They tell me there is a God," she went on, hoarsely, as she again struggled to her feet, "but I do not believe it—no God of love would ever create monsters like Emil Correlli, and allow them to deceive and ruin innocent girls, blackening their pure souls and turning them to fiends incarnate! Yes, I mean it," she panted, excitedly, as she caught Edith's look of horror at her irreverent and reckless expressions.

"Listen!" she continued, eagerly. "Only three years ago I was a pure and happy girl, living with my parents in my native land—fair, beautiful, sunny Italy—"

"Italy?" breathlessly interposed Edith, as she suddenly remembered that she also had been born in that far Southern clime. Then she grew suddenly pale as she caught the eyes of the little one gazing curiously into her face, and also remembered that "the curse" which his mother had but a moment before so deplored, rested upon her as well.

Involuntarily, she took his little hand, and lifting it to her lips, imprinted a soft caress upon it, at which the child smiled, showing his pretty white teeth, and murmured some fond musical term in Italian.

"You are an angel not to hate us both," said his mother, a sudden warmth in her tones, a gleam of gratitude in her dusky eyes. "But were you ever in Italy?" she added, curiously.

"Yes, when I was a little child; but I do not remember anything about it," said Edith, with a sigh. "Do not stand with the child in your arms," she added, thoughtfully. "Come, sit here, and then you can go on with what you were going to tell me."

And, with a little sense of malicious triumph, Edith pulled forward the beautiful rocker of carved ivory, and saw the woman sink wearily into it with a feeling of keen satisfaction. It seemed to her like the irony of fate that it should be thus occupied for the first time.

She would have been only too glad to heap all the beautiful clothes, jewels, and laces upon the woman also, but she felt that they did not belong to her, and she had no right to do so. Taking her little one on her knee, the young woman laid his head upon her breast, and swaying gently back and forth, began her story.

"My father was an olive grower, and owned a large vineyard besides, in the suburbs of Rome. He was a man of ample means, and took no little pride in the

pretty home which he was enabled to provide for his family. My mother was a beautiful woman, somewhat above him socially, although I never knew her to refer to the fact, and I was their only child.

"Like many other fond parents who have but one upon whom to expend their love and money, they thought I must be carefully reared and educated—nothing was considered too good for me, and I had every advantage which they could bestow. I was happy—I led an ideal life until I was seventeen years of age. When carnival time came around, we all went in to Rome to join in the festivities, and there I met my fate, in the form of Emil Correlli."

"Ah! but I thought that he was a Frenchman!" interposed Edith, in surprise.

"His father was a Frenchman, but his mother was born and reared in Italy, where, in Rome, he studied under the great sculptor, Powers," her guest explained. Then she resumed: "We met just as we were both entering the church of St. Peter's. He accidentally jostled me; then, as he turned to apologize, our eyes met, and from that moment my fate was sealed. I cannot tell you all that followed, dear lady, it would take too long; but, during the next three months it seemed to me as if I were living in Paradise. Before half that time had passed, Emil had confessed his love for me, and made an excuse to see me almost every day. But my parents did not approve; they objected to his attentions; his mother, they learned by some means, belonged to a noble family, and 'lords and counts should not mate with peasants,' they said."

"Then I made the fatal mistake of disobeying them and meeting my lover in secret. Ah, lady," she here interposed with a bitter sigh, "the rest is but the old story of man's deception and a maiden's blind confidence in him; and when, all too late, I discovered my error, there seemed but one thing for me to do, and that was to flee with him to America, whither he was coming to pursue his profession in a great city."

"And—did he not offer to—to marry you before you came?" queried Edith, aghast.

"No; he pretended that he dared not—he was so well-known in Rome that the secret would be sure to be discovered, he said, and then my father would separate us forever; but he promised that when we arrived in New York, he would make everything all right; therefore, I, still blindly trusting him, let him lead me whither he would.



"I was very ill during the passage, and for weeks following our arrival, and so the time slipped rapidly by without the consummation of my hopes, and though he gave me a pleasant home and everything that I wished for in the house where we lived, even allowing it to appear that I was his wife, we had not been here long before I saw that he was beginning to tire of me. I did everything I could to keep his love, I studied tirelessly to master the language of the country, and kept myself posted upon art and subjects which interested him most, in order to make myself companionable to him. Time after time I entreated him to fight the wrong he was doing me and another, who would soon come either into the shelter of his fatherhood or to inherit the stigma of a dishonored mother; but he always had some excuse with which to put me off. At last this little one came"—she said, folding the child more closely in her arms—"and I had something pure and sweet to love, even though I was heart-broken over knowing that a blight must always rest upon his life, and something to occupy the weary hours which, at times, hung so heavily upon my hands. After that Emil seemed to become more and more indifferent to me—there would be weeks at a time that I would not see him at all; I used sometimes to think that the boy was a reproach to him, and he could not bear the stings of his own conscience in his presence."

"Ah," interposed Edith, with a scornful curl of her red lips, "such men have no conscience; they live only to gratify their selfish impulses."

"Perhaps; while those they wrong live on and on, with a never-dying worm gnawing at their vitals," returned her companion, repressing a sob.

"At last," she resumed, "I began to grow jealous of him, and to spy upon his movements. I discovered that he went a great deal to one of the up-town hotels, and I sometimes saw him go out with a handsome woman, whom I afterward learned was his sister—the Mrs. Goddard, who lives here, and who visits New York several times every year. I did not mind so much when I discovered the relationship between them, although I suffered many a bitter pang to see how fond they were of each other, while I was starving for some expression of his love.

"This went on for nearly two years; then about two months ago, Emil disappeared from New York, without saying anything to me of his intentions, although he left plenty of money deposited to my account. He was always generous in that way, and insisted that I must have everything he wished or needed—I am sure he is fond of the child, in spite of everything. By perseverance and ceaseless inquiry, I finally learned that he had come to Boston,

and I immediately followed him. I am suspicious and jealous by nature, like all my people, and that day, when I saw him walking with you, and looking at you just as he used to look at me in those old delicious days in Italy, all the passion of my nature was aroused to arms. Braving everything, I rushed over to him and denounced him for his treachery to me, also accusing him of making love to you."

"And did it seem to you that I was receiving his attentions with pleasure?" questioned Edith, with a repugnant shrug of her shoulders. "I assure you he had forced his company upon me, and I only endured it to save making a scene in the street."

"I did not stop to reason about your appearance," said the woman; "at least not further than to realize that you were very lovely, and just the style of beauty to attract Emil; but he swore to me that you were only the companion of his sister, and he had only met you on the street by accident—that you were nothing to him. He asked me to tell him where he could find me, and promised that he would come to me later. He kept his word, and has visited me every few days ever since, treating me more kindly than for a long time, but insisting that I must keep entirely out of the way of his sister. And so it came upon me like a deadly blow when I read that account of his marriage in yesterday's paper. I was wrought up to a perfect frenzy, especially when I came to the statement that Monsieur and Madam Correlli would return immediately to Boston, but leave soon after for a trip South and West, and ultimately sail for Europe. That was more than outraged nature could bear, and I vowed that I would wreak a swift and sure revenge upon you both, and so, for two days, I have haunted this house, seeking for an opportunity to gain an entrance unobserved. I saw you sitting at the window—I recognized you instantly. I believed, of course, that you were a willing bride, and imagined that if I could get in I should find you both in this room. While I watched my chance, one of the servants came to the area door to let in the gas-man, and carelessly left it ajar, while she went back with him into one of the rooms. In a moment I was in the lower hall, looking for a back stairway; if any one had found me I was going to beg a drink of water for my child. There was a door there, but it was locked; but desperation makes one keen, and I was not long in finding a key hanging up on a nail beneath a window-sill. The next instant the door was unlocked, and I on my way upstairs —"

"And the key! oh! what did you do with the key?" breathlessly interposed Edith, grasping at this unexpected chance to escape.

"I have it here, lady," said her companion, as she produced it. "I thought it might be convenient for me to go out the same way, so took possession of it."

"Ah, then the door to the back stairway is still unlocked?" breathed Edith, with trembling lips.

"Yes; I did not stop to lock it after me; I hurried straight up here, but—expecting to have a very different interview from what I have had," responded the woman, with a heavy sigh. "Now, lady, you have my story," she continued, after a moment of silence, "you can see that I have been deeply wronged, and though from a moral standpoint, I have every claim upon Emil Correlli, yet legally, I have none whatever; and, unless you can prove some flaw in that ceremony of night before last—prove that he fraudulently tricked you into a marriage with him, you are irrevocably bound to him."

Edith shivered with pain and abhorrence at these last words, but she did not respond to them in any way.

"I came here with hatred in my heart toward you," the other went on, "but I shall go away blessing you for your kindness to me; for, instead of shrinking from me, as one defiled and too depraved to be tolerated, you have held out the hand of sympathy to me and listened patiently and pityingly to the story of my wrongs."

As she concluded, she dropped her face upon the head of her child with a weary, disheartened air that touched Edith deeply.

"Will you tell me your name?" she questioned, gently, after a moment or two of silence. "Pardon me," she added, flushing, as her companion looked up sharply, "I am not curious, but I do not know how to address you."

"Giulia Fiorini. Holy Mother forgive me the shame I have brought upon it!" she returned, with a sob. "I have called him"—laying her trembling hand upon the soft, silky curls of her child—"Ino Emil."

"Thank you," said Edith, "and for your confidence in me as well. You have been greatly wronged; and if there is any justice or humanity in law, this tie, which so fetters me, shall be annulled; then, perchance, Monsieur Correlli may be persuaded to do what is right toward you.

"No, lady, I have no hope of that," said Giulia, dejectedly, "for when a man begins to tire of the woman whom he has injured he also begins to despise her, and to consider himself ill-used because she even dares to exist."

"Perhaps you would wish to repudiate him," suggested Edith, who felt that such would be her attitude toward any man who had so wronged her.

"Oh, no; much as I have suffered, I still love Emil, and would gladly serve him for the remainder of my life, if he would but honor me with his name; but I know him too well ever to hope for that—I know that he is utterly selfish and would mercilessly set his heel upon me if I should attempt to stand in the way of his purposes. There is nothing left for me but to go back to my own country, confess my sin to my parents, and hide myself from the world until I die."

"Ah! but you forget that you have your child to rear and educate, his mind and life to mold, and—try to make him a better man than his father," said Edith, with a tender earnestness, which instantly melted the injured girl to tears.

"Oh, that you should have thought of that, when I, his mother, forget my duty to him, and think only of my own unhappiness!" sobbed the conscience-stricken girl, as she hugged the wondering child closer to her breast. "Yesterday I told myself that I would send Ino to him, and then end my misery forever."

"Don't!" exclaimed Edith, sharply, her face almost convulsed with pain. "Your life belongs to God, and—this baby. Live above your trouble, Giulia; never let your darling have the pain and shame of learning that his mother was a suicide. If you have made one mistake, do not imagine that you can expiate it by committing another a hundred-fold worse. Ah! think what comfort there would be in rearing your boy to a noble manhood, and then hear him say, 'What I am my mother has made me!'"

She had spoken earnestly, appealingly, and when she ceased, the unhappy woman seized her hand and covered it with kisses.

"Oh, you have saved me!" she sobbed; "you have poured oil into my wounds. I will do as you say—I will rise above my sin and shame; and if Ino lives to be an honor to himself and the world, I shall tell him of the angel who saved us both. I am very sorry for you," she added, looking, regretfully, up at Edith; "I could almost lay down my life for you now; but—Correlli is rich—very rich, and you may, perhaps, be able to get some comfort out of life by—"

Edith started to her feet, her face crimson.

"What?" she cried, scornfully, "do you suppose that I could ever take pleasure in spending even one dollar of his money? Look there!" pointing to the elegant

apparel upon the bed. "I found all those awaiting me when I came here to-day. In the dressing-case yonder there are laces, jewels, and fine raiment of every description, but I would go in rags before I would make use of a single article. I loathe the sight of them," she added, shuddering. "I should feel degraded, indeed, could I experience one moment of pleasure arrayed in them."

Suddenly she started, and looked at her watch, a wild hope animating her.

It was exactly quarter past two.

A train left for New York, via the Boston & Albany Railroad, at three o'clock.

If she could reach the Columbus avenue station, which was less than fifteen minutes' walk from Commonwealth avenue, without being missed, she would be in New York by nine o'clock, and safe, for a time at least, from the man she both hated and feared.



## **CHAPTER XXIII.**

## A SURPRISE AT THE GRAND CENTRAL STATION.

"Will you help me?" Edith eagerly inquired, turning to her companion, who had regarded her wonderingly while she repudiated the costly gifts which Emil Correlli had showered upon her.

"How can I help you, lady?" Giulia inquired, with a look of surprise.

"Call me Edith—I am only a poor, friendless girl, like yourself," she gently returned. "But I want to go away from this house immediately—I must get out of it unobserved; then I can catch a train that leaves Boston at three o'clock, for New York."

"Ah! you wish to run away from Emil!" exclaimed Giulia, her face lighting with eagerness.

"Yes—I would never own myself his wife for a single hour. I was planning, when you came in, to get away to-night when the house was quiet; but doubtless they would lock my door if I continued to be obstinate, and it would be a great deal better for me, every way, if I could go now," Edith explained.

"Yes, I will help you—I will do anything you wish," said Giulia, heartily.

"Then come!" exclaimed Edith, excitedly, "I want you to go down to him; he is in one of the rooms below—in the library, I think—a room under the one opposite this. He will be so astonished by your unexpected visit that he will be thrown off his guard, and you must manage to occupy his attention until you are sure I am well out of the house—which will be in less than ten minutes after you are in his presence—and then I shall have nothing more to fear from him."

"I will do it," said the Italian girl, rising, a look of resolve on her handsome but care-lined face.

"Thank you! thank you!" returned Edith, earnestly. "I am going straight to New York, to friends; but of course, you will not betray my plans."

"No, indeed; but do you think your friends can help you break with Emil—do you believe that ceremony can be canceled?" breathlessly inquired Giulia.

"I hope so," Edith gravely answered; "at all events, if I can but once put myself under the protection of my friends, I shall no longer fear him. I shall then try to have the marriage annulled. Perhaps, when he realizes how determined I am, he may even be willing to submit to it."

"Oh, do you think so?—do you think so?" cried Giulia, tremulously, and with hopeful eagerness.

"I will hope so," replied Edith, gravely, "and I will also hope that I may be able to do something to make you and this dear child happy once more. What a sweet little fellow he is!" she concluded, as she leaned forward and kissed him softly on the cheek, an act which brought the quick tears to his mother's eyes.

Again she seized the girl's delicate hand and carried it to her lips.

"Ah, to think! An hour ago I hated you!—now I worship you!" she cried, in an impassioned tone, a sob bursting from her trembling lips.

"You must go," said Edith, advancing to the door, and softly opening it. "I have no time to lose if I am to catch my train. Remember, the room under the one opposite this—you will easily find it. Now good-by, and Heaven bless you both."

With a look of deepest gratitude and veneration, Giulia Fiorini, her child clasped in her arms, passed out of the room and moved swiftly toward the grand staircase leading to the lower part of the house; while Edith, closing and locking the door after her, stood listening until she should reach the library, where she was sure Emil Correlli sat reading.

She heard the sweep of the girl's robes upon the stairs; then, a moment later, a stifled exclamation of mingled surprise and anger fell upon her ears, after which the library door was hastily shut, and Edith began to breathe more freely.

She hastened to put on her jacket, preparatory to leaving the house. But an instant afterward her heart leaped into her throat, as she caught the sound of the hurried opening and shutting of the library door again.

Then there came swift steps over the stairs.

Edith knew that Emil Correlli was coming to ascertain if she were safe within her room; that he feared if Giulia had succeeded in gaining an entrance there, without being discovered, she might possibly have escaped in the same way.



She moved noiselessly across the room toward the dressing-case and opened a drawer, just as there came a knock on her door.

"Is that you, Mrs. Goddard?" Edith questioned, in her usual tone of voice, though her heart was beating with great, frightened throbs.

"No; it is I," responded Emil Correlli. "I wish to speak with you a moment, Edith."

"You must excuse me just now, Mr. Correlli," the girl replied, as she rattled the stopper to one of the perfumery bottles on the dressing-case; "I am dressing, and cannot see any one just at present."

"Oh!" returned the voice from without, in a modified tone, as if the man were intensely relieved by her reply. "I beg your pardon; but when can I see you—how long will it take you to finish dressing?"

Edith glanced at the clock, and a little smile of triumph curled her lips, for she saw that the hands pointed to half-past two.

"Not more than fifteen or twenty minutes, perhaps," she returned.

"Ah, you are relenting!" said the man, eagerly. "You will come down by and by—you will dine with us this evening, Edith?" he concluded, in an appealing tone.

There was again a moment of hesitation on Edith's part, as if she were debating the question with herself; but if he could have seen her eyes, he would have been appalled by the look of fire and loathing that blazed in them.

"Mr. Correlli," she said at last, in a tone which he interpreted as one of timid concession, "I—I wish to do what is right and—I think perhaps I will come down as soon as I finish dressing."

His face lighted and flushed with triumph.

He believed that she was yielding—won over by the munificent gifts with which he had crowded her room.

"Ah! thank you! thank you!" he responded, with delight. "But take your own time, dear, and make yourself just as beautiful as possible, and I will come up for you in the course of half an hour."

He flattered himself that he would be well rid of Giulia by that time; and having

assured himself that Edith was safe in her room, and, as he believed, gradually submitting to his terms, he retraced his steps downstairs, the cruel lines about his mouth hardening as he went, for he had resolved to cast off forever the girl who had become nothing but a burden and an annoyance to him.

Edith did not move until she heard him enter the library again and close the door after him.

Then, hurriedly buttoning her jacket and pinning on her hat, she took from her trunk the package which she had made up an hour before, stole softly from her room and down the back stairs to the area hall.

The outer door was closed and bolted—the gas-man having long since finished his errand and departed—and she could hear the cook and one of the maids conversing in the kitchen just across the hall.

Evidently no one had attempted to go upstairs since Giulia's entrance, consequently the key had not yet been missed nor the door discovered to be unlocked.

Cautiously slipping the bolt to the street door, Edith quickly passed out, closing it noiselessly after her.

Another moment she was in the street, speeding with swift, light steps across the park.

Then, bending her course through Dartmouth street, she came to a narrow, crooked way called Buckingham street, which led her directly out upon Columbus avenue, when, turning to the left, she soon came to the station known by the same name.

Here she had ten minutes to wait, after purchasing her ticket, and the uneasiness with which she watched the slowly moving hands upon the clock in the gloomy waiting-room may be imagined.

Her waiting was over at last, and, exactly on time, the train came thundering to the station.

Edith quickly boarded it, then sank weak and trembling upon the nearest empty seat, her heart beating so rapidly that she panted with every breath.

Then the train began to move, and, with a prayer of thankfulness over her

escape, the excited girl leaned back against the cushion and gave herself up to rest, knowing that she could not now be overtaken before arriving in New York.

This feeling of security did not last long, however, and she was filled with dismay as she thought that Emil Correlli would doubtless discover her flight in the course of half an hour, if he had not already done so, when he would probably surmise that she would go immediately to New York and so telegraph to have her arrested upon her arrival there.

This was a difficulty which she had not foreseen.

What should she do?—how could she circumvent him? how protect herself and defy his authority over her?

A bright idea flashed into her mind.

She would telegraph to Royal Bryant at the first stop made by the train, ask him to meet her upon her arrival, and thus secure his protection against any plot that Emil Correlli might lay for her.

The first stopping-place she knew was Framingham, a small town about twenty miles from Boston.

The first time the conductor came through the car she asked him for a Western Union slip, when she wrote the following message and addressed it to Royal Bryant's office on Broadway:

"Shall arrive at Grand Central Station, via. B. & A. R. R., at nine o'clock.  
Do not fail to meet me. Important.

"EDITH ALLANDALE."

When the conductor came back again, she gave this to him, with the necessary money, and asked if he would kindly forward it from Framingham for her.

He cheerfully promised to do so. Then, feeling greatly relieved, Edith settled herself contentedly for a nap, for she was very weary and heavy-eyed from the long strain upon her nerves and lack of sleep.

She did not wake for more than three hours, when she found that daylight had faded, and that the lamps had been lighted in the car.

At New Haven she obtained a light lunch from a boy who was crying his viands

through the train, and when her hunger was satisfied she straightened her hat and drew on her gloves, knowing that another two hours would bring her to her destination.

Then she began to speculate upon possible and impossible things, and to grow very anxious regarding her safety upon her arrival in New York.

Perhaps Royal Bryant had not received her message.

He might have left his office before it arrived; maybe the officials at Framingham had even neglected to send it; or Mr. Bryant might have been out of town.

What could she do if, upon alighting from the train, some burly policeman should step up to her and claim her as his prisoner?

She had thus worked herself up to a very nervous and excited state by the time the lights of the great metropolis could be seen in the distance; her face grew flushed and feverish, her eyes were like two points of light, her temples throbbed, her pulses leaped, and her heart beat with great, frightened throbs.

The train had to make a short stop where one road crossed another just before entering the city, and the poor girl actually grew faint and dizzy with the fear that an officer might perhaps board the train at that point.

Almost as the thought flashed through her brain, the car door opened and a man entered, when a thrill of pain went quivering through every nerve, prickling to her very finger-tips.

A second glance showed her that it was a familiar form, and she almost cried out with joy as she recognized Royal Bryant and realized that she was—safe!

He saw her immediately and went directly to her, his gleaming eyes telling a story from his heart which instantly sent the rich color to her brow.

"Miss Allandale!" he exclaimed, in a low, eager tone, as he clasped her outstretched hand. "I am more than glad to see you once again."

"Then you received my telegram," she said, with a sigh of relief.

"Yes, else I should not be here," he smilingly returned; "but I came very near missing it. I was just on the point of leaving the office when the messenger-boy brought it in. I suppose our advertisement is to be thanked for your appearance

in New York thus opportunely."

"Not wholly," Edith returned, with some embarrassment. "If it had been that alone which called me here, I need not have telegraphed you. I saw it only yesterday; but my chief reason for coming hither is that I am a fugitive."

"A fugitive!" repeated her companion, in surprise. "Ah, yes, I wondered a little over that word 'important' in your message. It strikes me," he added, smiling significantly down upon her, "that you left New York in very much the same manner." "Yes," she faltered, flushing rosily.

"From whom and what were you fleeing, Edith? Surely not from one who would have been only too glad to shield you from every ill?" said the young man, in a tenderly reproachful tone, the import of which there was no mistaking.

She shot one swift glance into his face and saw that his eyes were luminous with the great love that was throbbing in his manly heart, and with an inward start of exceeding joy she dropped her lids again, but not before he had read in the look and the tell-tale flush that flooded cheek, brow, and neck, that his affection was returned.

"I will forgive you, dear, if you will be kind to me in the future," he whispered, taking courage from her sweet shyness and bashfulness. "And now tell me why you are a fugitive from Boston, for your telegram was dated from that city."

Thus recalled to herself, and a realization of her cruel situation, Edith shivered, and a deadly paleness banished the rosy blushes from her cheeks.

"I will," she murmured, "I will tell you all about the dreadful things that have happened to me; but not here," she added, with an anxious glance around. "Will you take me to some place where I shall be safe?" she continued, appealingly. "I have no place to go unless it is to some hotel, and I shrink from a public house."

"My child, why are you trembling so?" the young man inquired, as he saw she was shaking from head to foot. "I am very glad," he added, "that I was inspired to board the train at the crossing, and thus can give you my protection in the confusion of your arrival."

"I am glad, too; it was very thoughtful of you," said Edith, appreciatively; "but—but I am also going to need your help again in a legal way."

He started slightly at this; but replied, cheerfully:

"You shall have it; I am ready to throw myself heart and hand between you and any trouble of whatever nature. Now about a safe place for you to stay while you are in the city. I have a married cousin who lives on West Fortieth street; we are the best of friends and she will gladly entertain you at my request, until you can make other arrangements."

"But to intrude upon an entire stranger—" began Edith, looking greatly disturbed.

"Nellie will not seem like a stranger to you, two minutes after you have been introduced to her," the young man smilingly returned. "She is the dearest, sweetest little cousin a man ever had, and she has an equal admiration for your humble servant. She will thank me for bringing you to her, and I am sure that you will be happy with her. But why do you start so?—why are you so nervous?" he concluded, as she sprang from her seat, when the train stopped, and looked wildly about her.

"I am afraid," she gasped.

"Afraid of what?" he urged, with gentle persistence.

"Of a man who has been persecuting me," she panted, the look of anxious fear still in her eyes. "I ran away from him to-day, and I have been afraid, all the way to New York, that he would telegraph ahead of the train, and have me stopped—that was why I sent the message to you."

"I am very glad you did," said the young man, gravely. "But, Edith, pray do not look so terrified; you are sure to attract attention with that expression on your face. Calm yourself and trust me," he concluded, as he took her hand and laid it upon his arm.

"I do—I will," she said; but her fingers closed over his with a spasmodic clasp which told him how thoroughly wrought up she was.

"Have you a trunk?" he inquired, as they moved toward the door, the train having now entered the Grand Central Station.

"No; I left everything but a few necessary articles—I can send for it later by express," she responded.

The young man assisted her from the train, then replacing her hand upon his arm, was about to signal for a carriage when they were suddenly confronted by a

policeman and brought to a halt in the most summary manner.

"Sorry to trouble you, sir," said the man, speaking in a business-like tone to Mr. Bryant, "but I have orders to take this lady into custody."



## **CHAPTER XXIV.**



## **A SAD STORY DISCLOSED TO AN EAGER LISTENER.**

Royal Bryant was not very much surprised by this abrupt information and interference with their movements.

What Edith had said to him, just before getting out of the train, had suggested the possibility of such an incident, consequently he was not thrown off his guard, as he might otherwise have been.

At the same time he flushed up hotly, and, confronting the officer with flashing eyes, remarked, with freezing hauteur:

"I do not understand you, sir. I think you have made a mistake; this lady is under my protection."

"But I have orders to intercept a person answering to this lady's description," returned the policeman, but speaking with not quite his previous assurance.

"By whose orders are you acting, if I may inquire?" demanded the young man.

"A Boston party."

"And the lady's name, if you please?"

"No name is given, sir; but she is described as a girl of about twenty, pure blonde, very pretty, slight and graceful in figure, wearing a dark-brown dress and jacket and a brown hat with black feathers. She will be alone and has no baggage," said the policeman, reading from the telegram which he had received some two hours previous.

Mr. Bryant smiled loftily.

"Your description hits the case in some respects, I admit," he observed, with an appreciative glance at Edith, who stood beside him outwardly calm and collected, though the hand that rested upon his arm was tense with repressed emotion, "but in others it is wide of its mark. You have her personal appearance, in a general way, and the dress happens to correspond in everything but the hat. You will observe that the lady wears a black hat with a scarlet wing instead of a

brown one with black feathers. She did not arrive alone, either, as you perceive, we got off the train together."

The officer looked perplexed.

"What may your name be, sir, if you please?" he inquired, with more civility than he had yet shown.

"Royal Bryant, of the firm of Bryant & Co., Attorneys. Here is my card, and you can find me at my office between the hours of nine and four any day you may wish," the young man frankly returned, as he slipped the bit of pasteboard into the man's hand.

"And will you swear that you are not aiding and abetting this young lady in trying to escape the legal authority of friends in Boston?" questioned the policeman, as he sharply scanned the faces before him.

"Ahem! I was not aware that I was being examined under oath," responded the young lawyer, with quiet irony. "However, I am willing to give you my word of honor, as a gentleman, that this lady is accountable to no one in Boston for her movements."

"Well, I reckon I have made a mistake; but where in thunder, then, is the girl I'm after?" muttered the officer, with an anxious air.

"Does your telegram authorize you to arrest a runaway from Boston?" Mr. Bryant inquired, with every appearance of innocence.

"Yes, a girl from the smart set, who don't want any scandal over the matter," replied the man, referring again to the yellow slip in his hand.

"But she may not have come by the Boston and Albany line," objected Mr. Bryant. "There are several trains that leave the city from different stations about the same time; you may find your bird on a later train, Mr. Officer," he concluded, in a reassuring tone.

"That is so," was the thoughtful response.

"Then I suppose you will not care to detain us any longer," Mr. Bryant courteously remarked. "Come, Edith," he added, turning with a smile to his companion, and then he started to move on.

"Hold on! I'm blamed if I don't think I'm right after all," said the policeman, in a

tone of conviction, as he again placed himself in their path.

Royal Bryant flashed a look of fire at him.

"Have you a warrant for the lady's arrest?" he sternly demanded.

"No; I am simply ordered to detain her until her friends can come on and take charge of her," the man reluctantly admitted, while he heaved a sigh for the fat plum that had been promised him in the event of his "bagging his game."

"Then, if you are not legally authorized in this matter, I would advise you, as a friend, to make no mistake," gravely returned the young lawyer. "You might heap up wrath for yourself; while, if your patrons are anxious to avoid a scandal, you are taking the surest way to create one by interfering with the movements of myself and my companion. This young lady is my friend, and, as I have already told you, under my protection; as her attorney, also, I shall stand no nonsense, I assure you."

"Beg pardon, sir; but I'm only trying to obey orders," apologized the official. "But would you have the goodness to tell me this young lady's name."

At any other time and under any other circumstances Mr. Bryant would have resented this inquiry as an impertinence; but it occurred to him that an appearance of frankness and compliance might save them further inconvenience.

"Certainly," he responded, with the utmost cheerfulness, "this lady's name is Miss Edith Allandale and she is the daughter of the late Albert Allandale, of Allandale & Capen, bankers."

"It is all right, sir," said the officer, at last convinced that he had made a mistake, for Allandale & Capen had been a well-known firm to him. "You can go on," he added, touching his hat respectfully, "and I beg pardon for troubling you."

Without more ado he turned away, while Edith and her escort passed on, but the frightened girl was now trembling in every limb.

"Calm yourself, dear," whispered her companion, involuntarily using the affectionate term, as he hastened to lead her into the fresh air. "You are safe, and I will soon have you in a place where your enemies will never think of looking for you."

He beckoned to the driver of a carriage as he spoke, and in another minute was

assisting Edith into it; then, taking a seat beside her, he gave the man his order, and as the vehicle moved away in the darkness, the poor girl began to breathe freely for the first time since alighting from the train.

Mr. Bryant gave her a little time to recover herself, and then asked her to tell him all her trouble.

This she was only too glad to do; and, beginning with the death of her mother, she poured out the whole story of the last three months to him, dwelling mostly, however, upon the persecutions of Emil Correlli and the climax to which they had recently attained.

He listened attentively throughout, but interrupting her, now and then, to ask a pertinent question as it occurred to him.

"I was in despair," Edith finally remarked in conclusion, "until yesterday, when, by the merest chance, my eye fell upon that advertisement of yours and it flashed upon me that the best course for me to pursue would be to come directly to New York and seek your aid; I felt sure you would be as willing to help me as upon a previous occasion."

"Certainly I would—you judged me rightly," the young man responded, "but"—bending nearer to her and speaking in a slightly reproachful tone—"tell me, please, what was your object in leaving New York so unceremoniously?"

He felt the slight shock which went quivering through her at the question, and smiled to himself at her hesitation before she replied:

"I—I thought it was best," she faltered at last.

"Why for the 'best'?—for you or for me? Tell me, please," he pleaded, gently.

"For—both," she replied in a scarcely audible tone that thrilled him and made his face gleam with sudden tenderness.

"I—you will pardon me if I speak plainly—I thought it very strange," he remarked gravely. "It almost seemed to me as if you were fleeing from me, for I fully expected that you would return to the office on Thursday morning, as I had appointed. Had I done anything to offend you or drive you away—Edith?"

"No—oh, no," she quickly returned.

"I am very glad to know that," said her companion, a slight tremulousness in his

tones, "for I have feared that I might have betrayed my feelings in a way to wound or annoy you; for, Edith—I can no longer keep the secret—I had learned to love you with all my heart during that week that you spent in my office, and I resolved, on parting with you at the carriage, the morning of your release, to confess the fact to you as soon as you returned to the office, ask you to be my wife and thus let me stand between you and the world for all time. Nay,"—as Edith here made a little gesture as if to check him—"I must make a full confession now, while I have the opportunity. I was almost in despair when I received your brief note telling me that you had left the city and without giving me the slightest clew to your destination. All my plans, all my fond anticipations, were dashed to the earth, dear. I loved you so I felt that I could not bear the separation. I love you still, my darling—my heart leaped for joy this afternoon when I received your telegram. And now, while I have you here all to myself, I have dared to tell you of it, and beg you to tell me if there is any hope for me? Can you love me in return!—will you be my wife—?"

"Oh, hush! you forget the wretched tie that binds me to that villain in Boston," cried Edith, and there was such keen pain in her voice that tears involuntarily started to her companion's eyes, while at the same time both words and tone thrilled him with sweetest hope.

"No tie binds you to him, dear," he whispered, tenderly. "Do you think I would have opened my heart to you thus if I had really believed you to be the wife of another?"

"Oh, do you mean that the marriage was not legal? Oh, if I could believe that!" Edith exclaimed, with a note of such eager hope in her tones that it almost amounted to the confession her lover had solicited from her.

But he yearned to hear it in so many words from her lips.

"Tell me, Edith, if I can prove it to you, will there be hope for me?" he whispered.

Ought she to answer him as her heart dictated? Dare she confess her love with that stigma of her mother's early mistake resting upon her? she asked herself, in anguish of spirit.

She sat silent and miserable, undecided what to do.

If she acknowledged her love for him, without telling him, and he should

afterward discover the story of her birth, might he not feel that she had taken an unfair advantage of him.

And yet, how could she ever bring herself to disclose the shameful secret of that sad, sad tragedy which had occurred twenty years previous in Rome?

"I—dare not tell you," she murmured at last.

The young man started, then bent eagerly toward her.

"You 'dare' not tell me!" he cried, joyfully. "Darling, I am answered already! But why do you hesitate to open your heart to me?"

A sudden resolve took possession of her; she would tell him the whole truth, let come what might.

"I will not," she said. "I have a sad story to tell you; but first, explain to me what you meant when you said that no tie binds me to that man?"

"I meant that that marriage was simply a farce, in spite of the sacrilegious attempt of your enemies to legalize it," said the young lawyer, gravely.

"Can that be possible?" sighed Edith, her voice tremulous with joy.

"I will prove it to you. You have told me that this man Correlli lived with that Italian woman here in New York for two years or more."

"Yes."

"Do you know whether he allowed her to be known by his name?"

"No; but she told me that he allowed her to appear as his wife in the house where they lived."

"Well, then, if that can be proven—and I have not much doubt about the matter—the girl, by the laws of New York, which decree that if a couple live together in this State as husband and wife, they are such—this girl, I say, is the legal wife of Emil Correlli, consequently he can lay no claim to you without making himself liable to prosecution for the crime of bigamy."

"Are you sure?" breathed Edith, and almost faint from joy, in view of this blessed release from a fate which to her would have been worse than death.

"So sure, dear, that I have nothing to fear for your future, regarding your

connection with this man, and everything to hope for regarding your happiness and mine, if you will but tell me that you love me," her lover returned, as he boldly captured the hand that lay alluringly near him.

She did not withdraw it from his clasp.

It was so sweet to feel herself beloved and safe, under the protection of this true-hearted man, that a feeling of restfulness and content swept over her, and for the moment every other was absorbed by this.

Still, Royal Bryant realized that she had some reason for hesitating to acknowledge her affection for him, and after a moment of silence he said, gently:

"Forgive my impatience, dear, and tell me the 'sad story' to which you referred a little while ago."

A heavy sigh escaped Edith.

"You will be surprised to learn," she began, "that Mr. and Mrs. Allandale were not my own parents—that I was their adopted daughter."

"Indeed! I am surprised!" exclaimed Mr. Bryant.

"I did not discover the fact, however," the young girl pursued, "until the night after my mother's burial."

And then she proceeded to relate all that had occurred in connection with the box of letters which Mrs. Allandale had desired, when dying, to be burned.

She told of her subsequent examination of them, especially of those signed "Belle," and the story which they had revealed. How the young girl had left her home and parents to flee to Italy with the man whom she loved; how she had discovered, later, that her supposed marriage with him was a sham; how, soon after the birth of her child—Edith—her husband had deserted her for another, leaving her alone and unprotected in that strange land.

She related how, in her despair, her mother had resolved to die, and pleaded with her friend, Mrs. Allandale, to take her little one and rear it as her own, thus securing to her a happy home and life without the possibility of ever discovering the stigma attached to her birth or the cruel fate of her mother.

Royal Bryant listened to the pathetic tale without once interrupting the fair narrator, and Edith's heart sank more and more in her bosom as she proceeded,

and feared that she was so shocking him by these revelations that his affection for her would die with this expose of her secret.

But he still held her hand clasped in his; and when, at the conclusion of her story, she gently tried to withdraw it, his fingers closed more firmly over hers, when, bending still nearer to her, he questioned, in fond, eager tones:

"Was this the reason of your leaving New York so abruptly last December?"

"Yes."

"Was it because you loved me and could not trust yourself to meet me day after day without betraying the fact when you feared that the knowledge of your birth might become a barrier between us? Tell me, my darling, truly!"

"Yes," Edith confessed; "but how could you guess it—how could you read my heart so like an open book?"

The young man laughed out musically, and there was a ring of joyous triumph in the sound.

"'Tis said that 'love is blind,'" he said, "but mine was keen to read the signs I coveted, and I believed, even when you were in your deepest trouble, that you were beginning to love me, and that I should eventually win you."

"Why! did you begin to—" Edith began, and then checked herself in sudden confusion.

"Did I begin to plan to win you so far back as that?" he laughingly exclaimed, and putting his own interpretation upon her half-finished sentence. "My darling, I began to love you and to wish for you even before your first day's work was done for me."





## **CHAPTER XXV.**

## A NEW CHARACTER IS INTRODUCED.

"And now, love," the eager wooer continued, as he dropped the hand he had been holding and drew the happy girl into his arms, "you will give yourself to me—you will give me the right to stand between you and all future care or trouble?"

"Then you do not mind what I have just told you?" questioned Edith, timidly.

"Not in the least, only so far as it occasions you unhappiness or anxiety," unhesitatingly replied the young man. "You are unscathed by it—the sin and the shame belong alone to the man who ruined the life of your mother. You are my pearl, my fair lily, unspotted by any blight, and I should be unworthy of you, indeed, did I allow what you have told me to prejudice me in the slightest degree. Now tell me, Edith, that henceforth there shall be no barrier between us—tell me that you love me."

"How can I help it?" she murmured, as with a flood of ineffable joy sweeping into her soul she dropped her bright head upon his breast and yielded to his embrace.

"And will you be my wife?"

"Oh, if it is possible—if I can be," she faltered. "Are you sure that I am not already bound?"

"Leave all that to me—do not fret, even for one second, over it," her lover tenderly returned. Then he added, more lightly: "I am so sure, sweetheart, that to-morrow I shall bring you a letter which will proclaim to all whom it may concern, that henceforth you belong to me."

He lifted her face when he ceased speaking, and pressed his first caress upon her lips.

A little later he inquired:

"And have you no clue to the name of your parents?"

"No; all the clue that I have is simply the name of 'Belle' that was signed to the letters of which I have told you," Edith replied, with a regretful sigh.

"It is perhaps just as well, dear, after all," said her lover, cheerfully; "if you knew more, and should ever chance to meet the man who so wronged your mother, it might cause you a great deal of unhappiness."

"I have not a regret on his account," said Edith, bitterly; "but I would like to know something about my mother's early history and her friends. I have only sympathy and love in my heart for her, in spite of the fact that she erred greatly in leaving her home as she did, and, worse than all, in taking her own life."

"Poor little woman!" said Royal Bryant, with gentle sympathy; "despair must have turned her brain—she was more sinned against than sinning. But girls do not realize what a terrible mistake they are making when they allow men to persuade them to elope, leave their homes and best friends, and submit to a secret marriage. No man of honor would ever make such proposals to any woman—no man is worthy of any pure girl's love who will ask such a sacrifice on her part; and, in nine cases out of ten, I believe nothing but misery results from such a step."

"As in the case of poor Giulia Fiorini," remarked Edith, sadly. "But maybe she will be somewhat comforted when she discovers that she is Emil Correlli's legal wife."

"I fear that such knowledge will be but small satisfaction to her," her companion responded, "for if she should take measures to compel him to recognize the tie, he would doubtless rebel against the decision of the court; and, if she still loves him as you have represented, he would make her very wretched. However, he can be forced to make generous settlements, which will enable her to live comfortably and educate her child."

"And he will be entitled to his father's name, will he not?" inquired Edith, eagerly; "that would comfort her more than anything else."

"Yes, if he has ever acknowledged her as his wife, or allowed it to be assumed that she was, the child is entitled to the name," returned her lover. Then, as the carriage stopped, he added: "But here we are, my darling and I am sure you must be very weary after your long journey."

"Yes, I am tired, but very, very happy," the fair girl replied, looking up into his face with a sigh of content.

He smiled fondly upon her as he led her up the steps of a modest but pretty

house, between the draperies at the windows of which there streamed a cheerful light.

"Well, we will soon have you settled in a cozy room where you can rest to your heart's content," he remarked, and at the same time touching the electric button by his side.

"Really, Mr. Bryant, I cannot help feeling guilty to intrude upon an entire stranger at this time of night," Edith observed, in a troubled tone.

"You need not, dear, for I assure you Nellie will be delighted; but"—bending over her with a roguish laugh—"Mr. Bryant does not enjoy being addressed with so much formality by his fiancée. The name I love best—Roy—my mother gave me when I was a boy, and I want always to hear it from your lips after this."

A servant admitted them just at that moment, and upon responding to Mr. Bryant's inquiry, said that Mrs. Morrell was at home, and ushered them at once to her pretty parlor.

Presently the young hostess—a lady of perhaps twenty-five years—made her appearance and greeted her cousin With great cordiality.

"You know I am always glad to see you, Roy," she said, giving him both her hands and putting up her red lips for a cousinly kiss.

"I know you always make a fellow feel very welcome," said the young man, smiling. "And, Nellie, this is Miss Edith Allandale; she has just arrived from Boston, and I am going to ask you to receive her as your guest for a few days," he concluded, thus introducing Edith.

Mrs. Morrell turned smilingly to the beautiful girl.

"Miss Allandale is doubly welcome, for her own sake, as well as yours," was her gracious response, as she clasped Edith's hand, and if she experienced any surprise at thus having an utter stranger thrust upon her hospitality at that hour, she betrayed none, but proceeded at once to help her remove her hat and wraps.

Tears sprang to the eyes of the homeless girl at this cordial reception, and her lips quivered with repressed emotion as she thanked the gentle lady for it.

"What was that Roy was saying—that you have come from Boston this afternoon?" queried Mrs. Morrell, hastening to cover her embarrassment by

changing the subject. "Then you must be nearly famished, and you must have a lunch before you go to rest."

"Pray, do not trouble yourself—" Edith began.

"Please let me—I like such 'trouble,' as you are pleased to term it," smilingly interposed the pretty hostess; and with a bright nod and a hurried "excuse me," she was gone before Edith could make further objections.

"Nellie is the most hospitable little woman in the universe," Mr. Bryant remarked, as the door closed after her; "she is never so happy as when she is feeding the hungry or making somebody comfortable."

Fifteen minutes later she reappeared, a lovely flush on her round cheeks, her eyes bright with the pleasure she experienced in doing a kind act for the young stranger, toward whom she had been instantly attracted.

"Come, now," she said, holding out a hand to her, "and I know Roy will join us—he never yet refused a cup of tea of my own brewing."

"You are right, Nellie," smilingly replied that gentleman; "and I believe I am hungry, in spite of my hearty dinner at six o'clock. A ride over the pavements of New York will prepare almost any one for an extra meal. I only hope you have a slice of Aunt Janes's old-fashioned gingerbread for me."

Mrs. Morrell laughed out musically at this last remark.

"I never dare to be without it," she retorted, "for you never fail to ask for it. This cousin of mine, Miss Allandale, is always hungry when he comes to see me, and is never satisfied to go away without his slice of gingerbread. Perhaps," she added, shooting a roguish glance from one face to the other, for she had been quick to fathom their relations, "you will some time like to have mamma's recipe for it."

A conscious flush mantled Edith's cheek at this playful thrust, while the young lawyer gave vent to a hearty laugh of amusement in which a certain joyous ring betrayed to the shrewd little woman that she had not fired her shot amiss.

Then she led them into her home-like dining-room, where a table was laid for three, and where, over a generous supply of cold chicken, delicious bread and butter, home-made preserves, and the much lauded gingerbread, the trio spent a social half-hour, and Edith felt a sense of rest and content such as she had not

experienced since leaving her Fifth avenue home, more than two years previous.

As soon as the meal was finished, Mrs. Morrell, who saw how weary and heavy-eyed the fair girl appeared, remarked to her cousin, with a pretty air of authority, that she was "going to carry her guest off upstairs to bed immediately."

"You stay here until I come back, Roy," she added. "Charlie was obliged to go out upon important business, and I shall be glad of your company for a while."

"Very well, Nellie! I will stay for a little chat, for I have something important which I wish to say to you."

As he concluded he darted a smiling glance at Edith, which again brought the lovely color to her cheeks and revealed to her the nature of the important communication that he intended to make to his cousin.

She bade him a smiling good-night, and then gladly accompanied her hostess above, for she was really more weary than she had acknowledged.

When Mrs. Morrell returned to the parlor, Roy related to her something of Edith's history, and also confessed his own relationship toward her, while the little woman listened with an absorbed attention which betrayed how thoroughly she enjoyed the romance of the affair.

"She is lovely!" she remarked, "and"—with a thoughtful air—"it seems to me as if I have heard the name before. Edith Allandale!—it sounds very familiar to me. Why, Roy! she was one of Sister Blanche's classmates at Vassar, and she has her picture in her class album!"

"That is a singular coincidence!" the young man observed, no less surprised at this revelation, "and it makes matters all the more pleasant for me to learn that she is not wholly unknown to the family."

"And you mean to marry her very soon?" inquired his cousin.

"Just as soon as I can settle matters with that rascal in Boston to her satisfaction," responded the young man, with a gleam of fire in his eyes. "I do not apprehend any serious trouble about the affair; still, it may take longer than I wish."

"And may I keep her until then?" eagerly inquired Mrs. Morrell.

"Nellie! that is like your kind, generous heart!" exclaimed the young man, gratefully; "and I thank you from the bottom of mine. But, of course, that will have to be as Edith herself decides, while this business which I have in charge for her may interfere with such an arrangement."

"Oh, you mean in connection with the strange gentleman who has been searching for her."

"Yes. But I must go now; it is getting late, and I have a couple of letters to write yet. Take good care of my treasure, Nellie, and I will run in as early to-morrow as possible to see you both."

He kissed her affectionately, then bade her good-night and hurried away to his rooms at his club; while pretty Mrs. Morrell went back to her parlor, after letting him out, to await her husband's return, and to think over the romantic story to which she had just listened with deep interest.

There had been so much of a personal and tender nature to occupy their minds that Mr. Bryant had not thought to tell Edith anything about the circumstances that had led him to advertise in various papers for intelligence of her.

Some three weeks previous, a gentleman, of about fifty years, and calling himself Louis Raymond, had presented himself in his office, and inquired if he could give him any information regarding the late Albert Allandale's family.

He stated that he had spent most of his life abroad, but, his health beginning to fail, he had decided to return to his own country.

He had been quite ill since his arrival, and he began to fear that he had not long to live, and it behooved him to settle his affairs without further delay.

He stated that he had no relatives or family—he had never married; but, being possessed of large wealth, he wished to settle half of it upon Mrs. Allandale, if she could be found, or, if she was not living, upon her children. The remaining half he designed as a legacy to a certain charitable institution in the city.

He stated that he had been searching for the Allandales for several weeks; he had learned of Mr. Allandale's financial troubles and subsequent death, but could get no trace whatever of the other members of the family. He was wearied out with

his search, and now wished to turn the matter over to some one stronger than himself, and better versed in conducting such affairs.

Mr. Bryant could not fail to regard it as a singular coincidence that this business should have been thrown into his hands, especially as he was also so anxious to find Edith; and it can well be understood that he at once entered into the gentleman's plans with all his heart and soul.

He, of course, related all he knew of her history, and when he spoke of Mrs. Allandale's death he was startled to see his client grow deathly white and become so unnerved that, for a moment, he feared the shock would prove more than he could sustain.

But he recovered himself after a few moments.

"So she is gone!" he murmured, with a look in his eyes that told the secret of a deathless but unrequited love. "Well, Death's scythe spares no one, and perhaps it is better so. But this girl—her daughter," he added, rousing himself from his sad reflections; "we must try to find her."

"We will do our utmost," said the young lawyer, with a heartiness which betrayed the deep interest he felt in the matter. "As I have told you, I have not the slightest knowledge of her whereabouts, but think she may possibly be in Boston. Her letter to me, written just previous to her departure, gave me not the slightest clue to her destination. She promised to write to a woman who had been kind to her, and I arranged with her to let me know when she received a letter; but I have never seen her since—I once went to the house where she lived, but she had moved, and no one could tell me anything about her."

It may be as well to state here that shortly after Edith left New York, poor Mrs. O'Brien fell and broke her leg. She was taken to a hospital, and her children put into a home, consequently she never received Edith's letter, which was of course addressed to her old residence.

"I think our wisest course will be to advertise," the young lawyer pursued; "and if we do not achieve our end in that way, we can adopt other measures later on."

"Well, sir, do your best—I don't mind expense; and if the young lady can be found, I have a story to tell her which I think will deeply interest her," the gentleman returned. "If we should not be successful in the course of a few weeks, I will make a settlement upon her, to be left, with some other papers, in



your hands for a reasonable period, in the event of my death. But if all your efforts prove unavailing, the money will eventually go, with the rest, to the institution I have named."

Thus the matter had been left, and Mr. Bryant had immediately advertised, as we have seen, in several New York and Boston papers.

Three weeks had elapsed without any response, and Royal Bryant was beginning to be discouraged when he was suddenly made jubilant by receiving the telegram which Edith had written on the train after leaving Boston.

Thus, after leaving the house of his cousin, he repaired to his club, where he wrote a letter to his client, Mr. Raymond, telling him that Miss Allandale was found, and asking him to meet him at his office at as early an hour the following morning as possible.



## **CHAPTER XXVI.**

## **AN EXCITING INTERVIEW AND AN APPALLING DISCOVERY.**

We must now transport ourselves to Boston, in order to find out how Edith's flight was discovered, and what effect it produced in the Goddards' elegant home on Commonwealth avenue.

Emil Correlli had been seated in the handsome library, reading a society novel, when his sister went out to make her call, leaving him as guard over their prisoner above.

He had been much pleased with the report which she brought him from Edith, namely, that she believed she was yielding, and would make her appearance at dinner; at the same time he did not allow himself for a moment to become so absorbed in his book as to forget that he was on the watch for the slightest movement above stairs.

He and Mrs. Goddard had agreed that it would be wise not to make the girl a prisoner within her room, lest they antagonize her by so doing.

But while they appeared to leave her free to go out or come in, they intended to guard her none the less securely, and thus Monsieur Correlli kept watch and ward below.

He knew that Edith could not leave the house by the front door without his knowing it, and as he also knew that the back stairway door was locked on the outside, he had no fear that she would escape that way.

He, had not reckoned, however, upon the fact of an outsider entering by means of the area door and going upstairs, thus leaving that way available for Edith; and Giulia Fiorini had accomplished her purpose so cleverly and so noiselessly that no one save Edith dreamed of her presence in the house.

The two girls had carried on their conversation in such subdued tones that not a sound could be heard by any one below, and thus Emil Correlli was taken entirely by surprise when there came a gentle knock upon the half-open library door to interrupt his reading.

"Come in," he called out, thinking it might be one of the servants.

But when the door was pushed wider, and a woman entered, bearing a child in her arms, the astonished man sprang to his feet, an angry oath leaping to his lips, and every atom of color fading out of his face.

"Giulia?" he exclaimed, under his breath.

"Papa! papa!" cried the child, clapping his little hands, as he struggled out of his mother's arms, and ran toward him.

He took no notice of the child, but frowningly demanded, as he faced the girl:

"How on earth did you ever get into this house?"

"By a door, of course," laconically responded the intruder, but with crimson cheeks and blazing eyes, for the man's rude manner had aroused all her spirit.

"Well, and what do you want?" he cried, angrily; then, with a violent start, he added, nervously: "Wait; sit down, and I will be back in a moment."

It had occurred to him that if Giulia had been able to gain admittance to the house without his hearing her, Edith might find it just as easy to make her escape from it.

So, darting out of the room, he ran swiftly upstairs, to ascertain, as we have seen, if his captive was still safe.

We know the result, and how adroitly Edith allayed his suspicions; whereupon, wholly reassured regarding her, he returned to the library to settle, once for all, as he secretly resolved, with his discarded plaything.

"Well, Giulia," he began, as he re-entered her presence, "what has brought you here? what is your business with me?"

"I have come to ascertain if this is true, and what you have to say about it," she answered, as she brought forth the newspaper which she had shown Edith, and pointed to the article relating to the wedding at Wyoming.

The man tried to smile indifferently, but his eyes wavered beneath her blazing glance.

"Well, what of it?" he at last questioned, assuming a defiant air; "what if it is true?"

"Is it true?" she persisted; "have you really married that girl?"

"And what if I have?" he again questioned, evasively.

"I want the truth from your own lips—yes or no, Emil Correlli."

"Well, then—yes," he said, with a flash of anger.

"You own it—you dare own it to me, and—in the presence of your child?" almost shrieked the outraged woman.

"Stop, Giulia!" commanded her companion, sternly. "I will have no scene here to create a scandal among the servants. I intended to see you within a day or two; but, since you have sought me, we may as well at once come to an understanding. Did you think that you could hold me all my life? A man in my position must have a home in which to receive his friends, also a mistress in it to entertain them—"

"Have you forgotten all your vows and promises to me?" interposed Giulia, in tremulous tones; "that you swore everlasting fidelity to me?"

"A man vows a great many things that he finds he cannot fulfill," was the unfeeling response. "Surely, Giulia, you must realize that neither your birth nor education could entitle you to such a position as my wife must occupy."

"My birth was respectable, my education the best my country afforded," said the girl, with white lips. "Had you no intention of marrying me when you enticed me from my home to cross the ocean with you?"

"No."

The monosyllable seemed to fall like a heavy blow upon the girl's heart, for she shivered, and her face was distorted with agony.

"Oh, had you no heart? Why did you do such a fiendish thing?" she cried.

"Because you were pretty and agreeable, and I liked pleasant company. I have been accustomed to have whatever I wished for all my life."

"And you never loved me?"

"Oh, yes, for nearly three years I was quite fond of you—really, Giulia, I consider that I have been as faithful to you as you could expect."

"Oh, wretch! but you love this other girl more?"

"It would be worse than useless to attempt to deceive you on that point," said the man, his whole face softening at this mention of Edith.

"You lied to me, then, Emil Correlli!" cried the miserable woman, hoarsely; "you swore to me that the girl was nothing to you—that she was simply your sister's companion."

"And I simply told you the truth," he retorted. "She was nothing to me at that time; she was 'only my sister's companion.' However," he added, straightening himself haughtily, "there is no use in wrangling over the matter any further. I married Edith Allen the night before last, and henceforth she will be the mistress of my home. I confess it is a trifle hard on you, Giulia," he continued, speaking in a conciliatory tone, "but you must try to be sensible about it. I will settle a comfortable annuity upon you, and you can either go back to your parents or make a pleasant home for yourself somewhere in this country."

"And what of this boy?" questioned the discarded girl, laying her trembling hand upon the head of her child, who was looking from one to the other, a wondering expression on his young face.

Emil Correlli's lips twitched spasmodically for a moment. He would never have confessed it to a human being, but the little one was the dearest object the world held for him.

"I will provide handsomely for his future," he said, after considering for a minute. "If you will give him up to me he shall be reared as carefully as any gentleman's son, and, when he attains a proper age, I will establish him in some business or profession that will enable him to make his mark in the world."

"You would take him away from me to do this?" Giulia exclaimed, as she passionately caught her darling to her breast.

"That would be necessary, in order to carry out my purpose as I wish," the man coldly replied.

"Never! You are a monster in human form to suggest such a thing. Do you think I would ever give him up to you?"

"Just as you choose," her companion remarked, indifferently. "I have made you the proposition, and you can accept or reject it as you see fit, but if I take him, I

cannot have his future hampered by any environments or associations that would be likely to mar his life."

"Coward!" the word was thrown at him in a way that stung him like a lash, "do you dare twit me for what you alone are to blame? Where is your honor—where your humanity? Have you forgotten how you used every art to persuade me to leave the shelter of my pleasant home—the protection of my honest father and mother, to come hither with you? how you promised, by all that was sacred, to make me your wife if I would do your bidding? What I am you have made me—what this child is, you are responsible for. Ah, Emil Correlli, you have much to answer for, and the day will yet come when you will bitterly repent these irreparable wrongs—"

"Come, come Giulia! you are getting beside yourself with your tragic airs," her companion here interposed, in a would-be soothing tone. "There is no use working yourself up into a passion and running on like this. What has been done is done, and cannot be changed, so you had best make the most of what is left you. As I said before, I will give you a handsome allowance, and, if you will keep me posted regarding your whereabouts, I will make you and the boy a little visit now and then."

The girl regarded him with flashing eyes and sullen brow.

"You will live to repent," she remarked, as she gathered the child up in her arms and arose to leave the room, "and before this day is ended your punishment shall begin; you shall never know one moment of happiness with the girl whom you have dared to put in my place."

"Bah! all this is idle chatter, Giulia," said Emil Correlli, contemptuously; nevertheless, he paled visibly, and a cold chill ran over him, for somehow her words impressed him as a prophecy.

"What! are you going in such a temper as that?" he added, as she turned toward the door. "Well, when you get over it, let me hear from you occasionally."

"Never fear; you will hear from me oftener than you will like," she flashed out at him, with a look that made him cringe, as she laid her hand upon the knob of the door.

"Stay, Giulia! Aren't you going to let me have a word with Ino? Here, you black-eyed little rascal, haven't you anything to say to your daddy?" he added, in a

coaxing tone to the child.

"Mamma, may I talk to papa?" queried the little one, turning a pleading glance upon his mother.

"By the way," interposed the man, before she could reply, "you must put a stop to the youngster calling me that; it might be awkward, you see, if we should happen to meet some time upon the street. I like the little chap well enough, but you must teach him to keep his mouth shut when he comes near me."

"Who taught him the name?" sharply retorted Giulia. "Who boasted how bright and clever he was the first time he uttered the English word?"

Her listener flushed hotly and frowned.

"Your tongue is very sharp, Giulia," he said. "It would be more to your advantage to be upon good terms with me."

She made no reply, but, opening the door, passed out into the hall, he following her.

"As you will," he curtly said; then added, imperatively: "Come this way," and, leading her to the front door, he let her quietly out, glad to be rid of her before the butler or any of the other servants could learn of her presence in the house.

He watched her pass down the steps and out upon the street, then, softly closing the door, went back to the library.

He threw himself into a chair with a long-drawn sigh.

"I am afraid she means mischief," he muttered, with a frown. "I must get Edith away as soon as possible; I would not have them meet for anything. What a little vixen the girl is, curse her!"

He glanced at the clock.

It was five minutes of three, and twenty-five since he went up to Edith's room.

"It is about time she came down," he mused, with a shrug of impatience.

He arose and paced the room for a few moments, then passed out into the hall and listened.

The house was very still; he could not detect a sound anywhere.



He went slowly upstairs, walked up and down the hall once or twice, then rapped again upon Edith's door.

There was no response from within.

He knocked again.

Still silence!

He tried the door.

It was not locked; it yielded to his touch, and he pushed it open.

A quick glance around showed him that no one was there, and with a great heart-throb of fear he boldly entered.

Everything was exactly as he had left it when, the day before, he had so carefully arranged the room for the girl's comfort and pleasure.

The beautiful dresses hung over the foot-board of the bed—not even a fold had been disturbed—while the elegant sealskin cloak and the dainty hat and muff lay exactly as he had placed them, to display them to the best advantage.

The veins swelled out hard and full on his forehead—a gleam of baffled rage leaped into his eyes.

He sprang to the closet, throwing wide the door.

It was empty.

"She may have gone to the toilet-room," he muttered, grasping at this straw of hope.

He dashed across the hall and rapped upon the door.

But he met with no response.

He entered. The place was empty.

Back into the south chamber he sprang again, and began to search for Edith's hats and wraps.

Not an article of her clothing was visible.

He tried to open her trunk.

Of course it was locked.

He was now white as death, and actually shaking with anger.

He went to the dressing-case and mechanically opened the upper drawer.

All the costly treasures that he had purchased to tempt his bride lay there, exactly as he had placed them; he doubted if she had even seen them.

With a curse on his lips he went out, and looked into every other room on that floor; but it was, of course, a fruitless search.

Then he turned into the rear hall and went down the back stairs.

Ah! the door at the bottom was ajar.

Another moment he was in the lower hall, to find the area door unfastened; then he knew how his bird had flown.

He instantly summoned the servants, and took them to task for their negligence.

Both the cook and the chambermaid avowed that no one but the gas-man had entered or gone out by the area door that afternoon.

But, upon questioning them closely, Emil Correlli ascertained that the outer door had been left unfastened "just a moment, while the man went to the meter, to take the figures."

A close search revealed the fact that the key to the stairway door was missing, and, putting this and that together, the keen-witted man reasoned out just what had happened.

He believed that Giulia had stolen in through the area door close upon the heels of the gas-man; that she had found the key, unlocked the stairway-door, and made her way up to the library to seek an interview with him—he did not once suspect her of having seen Edith—while Edith, upon reconnoitering and finding the back way clear, had taken advantage of the situation and flown.

He was almost frantic with mingled rage and despair.

He angrily berated the servants for their carelessness, and vowed that he would have them discharged; then, having exhausted his vocabulary upon them, he went back to the library, wrathfully cursing Giulia for having forced herself into his presence to distract his attention, and thus allow his captive an opportunity to

escape.

Mr. and Mrs. Goddard returned about this time, both looking as if they also had met with some crushing blow, for the former was white and haggard, and the latter wild-eyed, and shivering from time to time, as if from a chill.

Both were apparently too absorbed in some trouble of their own to feel very much disturbed by the flight of Edith, although Mr. Goddard's face involuntarily lighted for an instant when he was told of her escape.

Emil Correlli flew to the nearest telegraph office and dashed off a message to a New York policeman, with whom he had had some dealings while living in that city, giving him a description of Edith, and ordering him, if he could lay his hands upon her, to telegraph back, and then detain her until he could arrive and relieve him of his charge.

He reasoned—and rightly, as we have seen—that Edith, would be more likely to return to her old home, where she knew every crook and turn, rather than to seek refuge in Boston, where she was friendless and a comparative stranger.

A few hours later he received a reply from the policeman, giving him an account of his adventure with Miss Edith Allandale and her escort.

"By heavens, she shall not thus escape me!" he exclaimed; and at once made rapid preparations for a journey.

Half an hour afterward he was on the eleven o'clock express train, in pursuit of the fair fugitive, in a state of mind that was far from enviable.



## **CHAPTER XXVII.**

## **MRS. GODDARD BECOMES AN EAVESDROPPER.**

When, after her interview with Edith, Mrs. Goddard went out to make her call, leaving her brother to keep watch and ward over their fair captive, she proceeded with all possible speed to the Copley Square Hotel, where she inquired for Mrs. Stewart.

The elevator bore her to the second floor, and the pretty maid, who answered her ring at the door of the elegant suite to which she had been directed, told her that her mistress was engaged just at present, but, if madam would walk into the reception-room and wait a while, she had no doubt that Mrs. Stewart would soon be at liberty. "Would madam be kind enough to give her a card to take in?"

Mrs. Goddard pretended to look for her card-case, first in one pocket of her wrap, then in another.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "I must have left my cards at home! How unfortunate! But it does not matter," she added, with one of her brilliant smiles; "I am an old acquaintance, and you can simply announce me when I am admitted."

The girl bowed and went away, leaving the visitor by herself in the pretty reception-room, for she had been told not to disturb her mistress until she should ring for her.

Mrs. Goddard looked curiously around her, and was impressed with the elegance of everything in the apartment.

Exquisite paintings and engravings graced the delicately tinted walls; choice statuettes, bric-a-brac, and old-world curios of every description, which she knew must have cost a small fortune even in the countries where they were produced, were artistically arranged about the room.

There was also an air of refinement and rare taste in the draperies, carpets, and blending of color, which proclaimed the occupant of the place to be above the average lady in point of culture and appreciation of all that was beautiful.

Impressed with all this, and looking back to her meeting with Mrs. Stewart, on

the evening of the ball at Wyoming—remembering her beauty and grace, and the elegance of her costume, madam's heart sank within her, and she seemed to age with every passing moment.

"Oh, to think of it!—to think of it, after all these years! I will not believe it!" she murmured, with white, trembling lips, as she arose and nervously paced the room.

Presently the sound of muffled voices in a room beyond attracted her attention.

She started and bent her ear to listen.

She could catch no word that was spoken, although she could distinguish now a man's and then a woman's tones.

With stealthy movements she glided into the next room, which was even more luxuriously furnished than the one she had left, when she observed that the portieres, draping an arch leading into still another apartment, were closely drawn.

And now, although she could not hear what was being said, she suddenly recognized, with a pang of agony that made her gasp for breath, the voice of her husband in earnest conversation with the woman who had been her guest two nights previous.

As noiselessly as a cat creeps after her prey, Anna Goddard stole across that spacious apartment and concealed herself among the voluminous folds of the draperies, where she found that she could easily hear all that was said.

"You are very hard, Isabel," she heard Gerald Goddard remark, in a reproachful voice.

"I grant you that," responded the liquid tones of his companion, "as far as you and—that woman are concerned, I have no more feeling than a stone."

At those words, "that woman," spoken in accents of supreme contempt, the eyes of Anna Goddard began to blaze with a baneful gleam.

"And you will never forgive me for the wrong I did you so long ago?" pleaded the man, with a sigh.

"What do you mean by that word 'forgive?'" coldly inquired Mrs. Stewart.

"Pardon, remission—as Shakespeare has it, 'forgive and quite forget old faults,'" returned Gerald Goddard, in a voice tremulous with repressed emotion.

"Forget!" repeated the beautiful woman, in a wondering tone.

"Ah, if you could," eagerly cried her visitor; then, as if he could control himself no longer, he went on, with passionate vehemence: "Oh, Isabel! when you burst upon me, so like a radiant star, the other night, and I realized that you were still in the flesh, instead of lying in that lonely grave in far-off-Italy—when I saw you so grandly beautiful—saw how wonderfully you had developed in every way, all the old love came back to me, and I realized my foolish mistake of that by-gone time as I had never realized it before."

Ah! if the man could have seen the white, set face concealed among the draperies so near him—if he could have caught the deadly gleam that shone with tiger-like fury in Anna Goddard's dusky eyes—he never would have dared to face her again after giving utterance to those maddening words.

"It strikes me, Mr. Goddard, that it is rather late—after twenty years—to make such an acknowledgment to me," Isabel Stewart retorted, with quiet irony.

"I know it—I feel it now," he responded, in accents of despair. "I know that I forfeited both your love and respect when I began to yield to the charms and flatteries of Anna Correlli. She was handsome, as you know; she began to be fond of me from the moment of our introduction; and when, in an unguarded moment, I revealed the—the fact that you were not my wife, she resolved that she would supplant you—"

"Yes, 'the woman—she gavest me and I did eat,'" interposed his companion, with a scathing ring of scorn in the words. "That is always the cry of cowards like you, when they find themselves worsted by their own folly," she went on, indignantly. "Woman must always bear the scorpion lash of blame from her betrayer while the world also awards her only shame and ostracism from society, if she yields to the persuasive voice of her charmer, admiring and believing in him and allowing him to go unsmirched by the venomous breath of scandal. It is only his victim—his innocent victim oftentimes, as in my case—who suffers; he is greeted everywhere with open arms and flattering smiles, even though he repeats his offenses again and again."

"Isabel! spare me!"

"No, I will not spare you," she continued, sternly. "You know, Gerald Goddard, that I was a pure and innocent girl when you tempted me to leave my father's house and flee with you to Italy. You were older than I, by eight years; you had seen much of the world, and you knew your power. You cunningly planned that secret marriage, which you intended from the first should be only a farce, but which, I have learned since, was in every respect a legal ceremony—"

"Ha! I thought so!" cried her companion, with a sudden shock. "When did you hear?—who told you?"

"I met your friend, Will Forsyth, only two years ago—just before my return to this country—and when I took him to task for the shameful part which he had played to assist you in carrying out your ignominious plot, telling him that you had owned to his being disguised as an aged minister to perform the sacrilegious ceremony, he confessed to me that, at the last moment, his heart had failed him, whereupon he went to an old clergyman, a friend of his father, revealed everything, and persuaded him to perform the marriage in a legal manner; and thus, Gerald Goddard, I became your lawful wife instead of your victim, as you supposed."

"Yes, I know it. Forsyth afterward sent me the certificate and explained everything to me," the man admitted, with a guilty flush. "I received the paper about a year after the report of your death."

"Ah! that could not have been very gratifying to—your other—victim," remarked Mrs. Stewart, with quiet sarcasm.

"Isabel! you are merciless!" cried the man, writhing under her scorn. "But since you have learned so much, I may as well tell you everything. Of course Anna was furious when she discovered that she was no wife, for I had sworn to her that there was no legal tie between you and me—"

"Ah! then she also learned the truth!" interposed his companion. "I almost wonder you did not try to keep the knowledge from her."

"I could not—she was present when the document arrived, and the shock to me was so great I betrayed it, and she insisted upon knowing what had caused it, when she raved like an insane person, for a time."

"But I suppose you packed her by being married over again, since you have lived with her for nearly twenty years," remarked Mrs. Stewart.



"No, I did not," returned her visitor, hotly. "To tell the truth, I had begun to tire of her even then—she was so furiously jealous, passionate, and unreasonable upon the slightest pretext that at times she made life wretched for me. So I told myself that so long as I held that certificate as proof that she had no legal hold upon me, I should have it in my power to manage her and cow her into submission when she became ungovernable by other means. I represented to her that, to all intents and purposes, we were man and wife, and if we should have the ceremony repeated, after having lived together so long, it would create a scandal, for some one would be sure to find it out, sooner or later. For a time this appeared to pacify her; but one day, during my absence from home, she stole the certificate, although I thought I had concealed it where no one would think of looking for it. It has been in her possession ever since. I have tried many times to recover it; but she was more clever than I, and I never could find it, while she has always told me that she would never relinquish it, except upon one condition —"

"And that was—what?"

"Ever the same old demand—that I would make her legally my wife."

"But she never could have been that so long as I lived," objected Mrs. Stewart.

"True; but she would have been satisfied with a repetition of the ceremony, as we did not know that you were living."

"If you have been so unhappy, why have you lived with her all these years?"

The man hesitated for a moment before replying to this question. At length he said, although he flushed scarlet over the confession:

"There have been several reasons. In spite of her variable moods and many faults, Anna is a handsome and accomplished woman. She entertains magnificently, and has made an elegant mistress for our establishment. We have been over the world together several times, and are known in many cities both in this country and abroad, consequently it would have occasioned no end of scandal if there had been a separation. Thus, though she has tried my patience sorely at times, we have perhaps, on the whole, got along as amicably as hundreds of other couples. Besides—ahem!—"

The man abruptly ceased, as if, unwittingly, he had been about to say something that had better be left unsaid.

"Well—besides what?" queried his listener.

"Doubtless you will think it rather a humiliating confession to make," said Gerald Goddard, with a crestfallen air, "but during the last few years I have lost a great deal of money in unfortunate speculation, so—I have been somewhat dependent upon Anna in a financial way."

"Ah! I understand," remarked Mrs. Stewart, her delicate nostrils dilating scornfully at this evidence of a weak, ease-loving nature, that would be content to lean upon a rich wife, rather than be up and doing for himself, and making his own way in the world. "Are you not engaged with your profession?"

"No; Anna has not been willing, for a long time, that I should paint for money."

"And so your talents are deteriorating for want of use."

The scorn in her tones stung him keenly, and he flushed to his temples.

"You do not appear to lack for the luxuries of life," he retorted, glancing about the elegant apartment, with a sullen air, but ignoring her thrust.

"No, I have an abundance," she quietly replied; but evidently she did not deem it necessary to explain how she happened to be so favored.

"Will you explain to me the mystery of your existence, Isabel?" Mr. Goddard inquired, after an awkward silence. "I cannot understand it—I am sometimes tempted to believe that you are not Isabel, after all, but some one else who—"

"Pray disabuse yourself of all such doubts," she quickly interposed, "for I assure you that I am none other than that confiding but misguided girl whom you sought to lure to her destruction twenty years ago. If it were necessary, I could give you every detail of our life from the time I left my home until that fatal day when you deserted me for Anna Correlli."

"But Anna claims that she saw you dead in your casket."

A slight shiver shook the beautiful woman from head to foot at this reference to the ghastly subject.

"Yes, I know it—"

"You know it!" exclaimed the man, amazed.

"Exactly; but I will tell you the whole story, and then you will no longer have

any doubt regarding my identity," Mrs. Stewart remarked. "After you left Rome with Anna Correlli, and I realized that I had been abandoned, and my child left to the tender mercies of a world that would not hesitate to brand her with a terrible stigma, for which her father alone was to blame, I resolved that I would not live. Grief, shame, and despair for the time rendered me insane, else I, who had been religiously reared, with a feeling of horror for the suicide's end, would never have dared to meditate taking the life that belonged to God. I was not so bereft of sense, however, but that my motherhood inspired me to make an effort to provide for my little one, and I wrote an earnest appeal to my old schoolmate and friend, Edith Allandale, who, I knew, would shortly be in Rome, asking her to take the child and rear her as her own—"

"What! Then you did not try to drown the child as well as yourself!" gasped Gerald Goddard, in an excited tone.

"No; had I done so, I should never have lived to tell you this story," said the woman, tremulously. "But wait—you shall learn everything, as far as I know, just as it happened. Having written my appeal, which I felt sure would be heeded, I took my baby to the woman who had nursed me, told her that I had been suddenly called away, and asked her to care for her until my return. She readily promised, not once suspecting that a stranger would come for her in my place, and that it was my purpose never to see her again. From the moment of my leaving the woman's house—that last straw of surrendering my baby was more than my heart and brain could bear—everything, with one exception, was a blank to me until I awoke to consciousness, five weeks later, to find myself being tenderly cared for in the home of a young man, who was spending the winter in Rome for his health. His sister—a lovely girl, a few years his senior—was with him, acting both as his nurse and physician, she having taken her degree in a Philadelphia medical college, just out of love for the profession. And she it was who had cared for me during my long illness. She told me that her brother was in the habit of spending a great deal of his time upon the Tiber; that one evening, just at dusk, as he was upon the point of passing under a bridge, a little way out of the city, he was startled to see some one leap from it into the water and immediately sink. He shot his boat to the spot, and when the figure arose to the surface, he was ready to grasp it. It was no easy matter to lift it into his boat, but he succeeded at last, when he rowed with all possible speed back to the city, where, instead of notifying the police and giving me into their hands to be taken either to a hospital or to the morgue, as the case might demand, he procured a carriage and took me directly to his home, where he felt that his sister

could do more for me than any one else."

"Who was this young man?" Gerald Goddard here interposed, while he searched his companion's face curiously.

"Willard Livermore," calmly replied Mrs. Stewart, as she steadily met his glance, although the color in her cheeks deepened visibly.

"Ha! the man who accompanied you to Wyoming night before last?"

"Yes."

"I have heard that he has long wanted to marry you—that he is your lover," said Mr. Goddard, flashing a jealous look at her.

"He is my friend, stanch and true; a man whom I honor above all men," was the composed reply; but the woman's voice was vibrant with an earnestness which betrayed how much the words meant to her.

"Then why have you not married him?"

"Because I was already bound."

"But you have told me that you did not know you were legally bound until within the last two years."

Isabel Stewart lifted a grave glance to her companion's face.

"When, as a girl, I left my home to go with you to Italy," she said, solemnly, "I took upon myself vows which only death could cancel—they were as binding upon me as if you had always been true to me; and so, while you lived, I could never become the wife of another. I have lived my life as a pure and faithful wife should live. Although my youth was marred by an irrevocable mistake, which resulted in an act of frenzy for which I was not accountable, no willful wrong has ever cast a blight upon my character since the day that Willard Livermore rescued me from a watery grave in the depths of the yellow Tiber."

And Gerald Goddard, looking into the beautiful and noble face before him, knew that she spoke only the truth, while a blush of shame surged over his own, and caused his head to droop before the purity of her steadfast eyes.

"All efforts upon the part of Miss Livermore and her brother to resuscitate me," Mrs. Stewart resumed, going on with her story from the point where she had

been interrupted, "were unavailing. Another physician was called to their assistance; but he at once pronounced life to be extinct, and their efforts were reluctantly abandoned. Even then that noble brother and sister would not allow me to be sent to the morgue. They advertised in all the papers, giving a careful description of me, and begging my friends—if there were such in Rome—to come to claim me. Among the many curious gazers who—attracted by the air of mystery which enveloped me—came to look upon me, only one person seemed to betray the slightest evidence of ever having seen me before. That person was Anna Correlli—Ah! what was that?"

This sudden break and startled query was caused by the rattling of the rings which held the portieres upon the pole across the archway between the two rooms, and by the gentle swaying of the draperies to and fro.



## **CHAPTER XXVIII.**

## ISABEL STEWART ASTOUNDS MR. GODDARD.

But there was not a sound to be heard in the room beyond, although the curtains still continued to vibrate gently, thus showing the presence of some object that had caused the movement.

Mrs. Stewart arose to investigate, for the conversation in which she had been engaged and the story she was relating were of such a nature that she did not care to have a third party, especially a servant, overhear it.

She parted the draperies and looked curiously into the room beyond.

But her act only revealed a pretty maltese kitten, which, being thus aroused from its slumbers in its cozy place of concealment, rolled over on its back and began to play with the heavy fringe that bordered the costly hangings.

"Ah, Greylocks! so you are the rogue who has startled us!" said the lady, with an amused smile. "I feared that we had an eavesdropper. You are a very innocent one, however, and we will not take the trouble to banish you."

She went back to her chair reassured, and without a suspicion of the presence of one who hated her with a deadly hatred, and who still stood, pale and trembling, concealed by the voluminous folds of the draperies, but waiting with eager curiosity to overhear what should follow.

Meantime the maid who had admitted Mrs. Goddard, feeling that she must become wearied with her long waiting, had returned to the reception-room to ascertain if she still desired to remain until her mistress should be at liberty; but finding it empty, had concluded that the lady had left the house, and so went about her business, thinking no more of the matter.

"Yes," resumed Mrs. Stewart, after she had resumed her seat, "I knew, from the description which my kind friends afterward gave me, that Anna Correlli had come there to assure herself that her rival was really dead. When—suspecting from her manner that she might know something about me—they questioned her, she told them that, 'from what she had read in the papers, she feared it might be some one whom she knew; but she was mistaken—I was nothing to her—she had never seen me before.' Then she went away with an air of utter indifference,

and I was left fortunately to the kindness of that noble hearted brother and sister. They did everything that the fondest relatives could have done, and, in their divine pity for one so friendless and unfortunate, neglected not the smallest detail which they would have bestowed upon an own sister. Only they, besides the undertaker and the one Protestant pastor in the city, were present during the reading of the service; and when that was over, Willard Livermore, actuated by some unaccountable impulse, insisted upon closing the casket. He bent over me to remove a Roman lily which his sister had placed in my hands, and which he wished to preserve, and, while doing so, observed that my fingers were no longer rigid—that the nails were even faintly tinted. He was startled, and instantly summoned his sister. Hardly had her own fingers pressed my pulse in search of evidence of life, when my eyes unclosed and I moaned:

"Don't let her come near me! She has stolen all the love out of my life!"

"Then I immediately relapsed again into unconsciousness without even knowing I had spoken. Later, when told of the fact, I could dimly recall the sensation of a sudden shock which was instantly followed by a vision of Anna Correlli's face and the sound of her voice, and I firmly believe, to-day, that it was her presence alone that startled my chilled pulses once more into action and thus awoke to new life the torpid soul which had so nearly passed out into the great unknown."

Could the narrator have seen the face of the listener outside, her tongue would have been paralyzed and the remainder of her story would never have been told; for Anna Goddard, upon learning that she had been the means of calling back to earth the woman whose existence had shorn her of every future hope, looked—with her wild eyes and demoniac face—as if she could be capable of any act that would utterly annihilate the unsuspecting companion of the man whom her untamed soul worshiped as only such a fierce and selfish nature could worship a human being.

But she made no sign or sound to betray her presence, for she was curious to hear the remainder of this strange story—to learn how her beautiful rival had risen from disgrace and obscurity to her present prosperity and enviable position in society.

"Of course," Mrs. Stewart resumed, "Mr. and Miss Livermore were both thrown into a state of great excitement at such an unexpected manifestation; but my words told them that there was some sad and mysterious story connected with my life and the rash deed I had committed, and they resolved to still surround me



with their care and protection until I should recover—if that were possible—instead of committing me to a hospital, as many would have done.

"They bound both the clergyman and the undertaker to the strictest secrecy; then I was immediately conveyed to Miss Livermore's own room, where that noble girl cared for me as tenderly as a mother would nurse her own child. For weeks I hovered between life and death, then slowly began to mend. When I was able, I related to my kind friends the story of my wrongs, to receive only gentle sympathy and encouragement, instead of coldness and censure, such as the world usually metes out to girls who err as I had erred. As I grew stronger, and realized that I was to live, my mother-heart began to long for its child. Miss Livermore agreed with me that it would be better for me to have her, and went herself to make inquiries regarding her. But the nurse had moved and none of her neighbors could give any information about her, except that for a time she had charge of an infant, but after its parents had come to claim it, she had moved away, and no one could tell whither she had gone.

"From this I knew that my old friend, Edith Allendale, had responded nobly to my appeal—that she had taken my child and adopted it as her own. At first I was inclined to be disappointed, and contemplated writing to Edith, telling her what had happened and ask her to surrender the little one to me; but after thinking the matter over more at length, I reasoned that it would be best to let everything rest just as it was. I knew that my darling would be tenderly reared in her new home; she would grow up to a happy womanhood without ever knowing of the blight that rested upon her birth, or that her father had been a villain, her mother a wronged and ruined woman—almost a suicide. So I decided that I would never reveal myself to my old friend, or undeceive her regarding my supposed fate, to disturb her peace or her enjoyment of the child.

"But, following the advice of my new friends, I finally wrote to my father and mother, confessing everything to them, imploring their forgiveness for the grief and shame I had brought upon them, and asking their counsel and wishes regarding my future. Imagine my joy and gratitude when, three weeks later, they walked in upon me and took me at once to their hearts, ignoring all the past, as far as any censure or condemnation were concerned, and began to plan to make my future as peaceful and happy as circumstances would allow.

"They had come abroad with the intention of remaining, they told me; they would never ask me to return to my former home, where the fact that I had eloped with an artist was known, but would settle in London, where my father

had some business interests, and where, surrounded by the multitude, our former friends would never be likely to meet us. We lived there, a quiet, peaceful, prosperous life, I devoting myself assiduously to study to make up for what I had sacrificed by leaving school so early, and to keep my mind from dwelling upon my unhappy past.

"So the time slipped away until, five years ago, this tranquil life was suddenly interrupted by my father's death. Six months later my mother followed him, and I was again left alone, without a relative in the world, the sole heiress to a half-million pounds—"

"A half-million pounds?" interposed Gerald Goddard, in a tone of amazement.

"Yes; but of what value is money without some one to share it with you?" questioned Isabel Stewart, in a voice of sadness.

Her companion passed his hand across his brow, a dazed expression upon his face, while he was saying to himself, that, in his folly, he had missed an ideal existence with this brilliantly beautiful and accomplished woman, who, in addition, was now the possessor of two and a half million dollars.

What an idiot he had been! What an unconscionable craven, to sacrifice this pure and conscientious creature to his passion for one who had made his life wretched by her variable moods and selfishness!

"Occasionally I heard from my child," Mrs. Stewart resumed, after a moment of silence, while tears started into her beautiful eyes. "My father crossed the ocean from time to time, for the sole purpose of learning something of her, in order to satisfy my hungry heart. He never revealed the fact of my existence to any one, however, although he managed to learn that my darling was happy, growing up to be a pure and lovely girl, as well as a great comfort to her adopted parents, and with nothing to mar her future prospects. Of course such tidings were always gleams of great comfort to my sad and quiet life, and I tried to be satisfied with them—tried to be grateful for them. But, oh! since the death of my parents, I have yearned for her with an inexpressible heart-hunger—"

A sob of pain burst from the beautiful woman's lips and interrupted her narrative at this point.

But she recovered herself almost immediately, and resumed:

"A year or two after I was left alone I happened to meet your former friend, Will

Forsyth, and from him learned that I had always been your legal wife, and that he had sent you proofs of the fact, about a year after your desertion of me.

"This astonishing intelligence animated me with a new purpose, and I resolved that I would seek the world over for you, and demand that proof from you.

"I returned immediately to this country and established myself in New York, where, Mr. Forsyth told me, he thought you were residing. Soon after my arrival I learned, to my dismay, that Mr. Allandale had recently died, leaving his family in a destitute condition. This knowledge changed my plans somewhat; I gave up my quest for you, for the time, and began to search for my old friend who, for eighteen years, had been a mother to my child. I had no intention of interrupting the relations between them—my only thought was to provide for their future in a way to preclude the possibility of their ever knowing the meaning of the word poverty. But my utmost efforts proved unavailing—I could learn nothing of them; but I finally did get trace of you, and two months ago came on to Boston, determined to face you and compel you to surrender to me the certificate of our marriage."

"Ha! did you expect that I would yield to you?" questioned Gerald Goddard, a note of defiance in his voice.

"Certainly—I knew I could compel you to do so."

"Indeed? You were sanguine! By what arguments did you expect to achieve your desire? How could you even prove that I had such a paper?"

"I do not know that I could have proven that you possessed the certificate," quietly responded Mrs. Stewart; "but I could at least prove that such a paper once existed, for Mr. Forsyth assured me that, if I needed assistance to establish the fact of my marriage he would be ready to give it at any time. I did not think I should need to call upon him, however; I reasoned that, rather than submit to an arrest and scandal, for—bigamy, you would quietly surrender the certificate to me."

Gerald Goddard shivered at the sound of those three ugly words, while the listener, behind the draperies, clinched her hands and locked her teeth to keep herself from shrieking aloud in her agony, and thus revealing her presence.

"I am afraid you will find that you have reckoned without your host, madam," the man at length retorted, for he was stung to the soul with the covert threat

which had suggested the possibility that he, Gerald Goddard, the noted artist, the distinguished society man, and princely entertainer, might be made to figure conspicuously in a criminal court under a charge that would brand him for all time.

"Ah! how so?" quietly inquired his companion.

"No power on earth would ever have compelled me to relinquish it, Mr. Forsyth's assurance to the contrary notwithstanding."

The man paused, to see what effect this assertion would have upon his listener; but she made no response—she simply sat quietly regarding him, while a curious little smile hovered about her beautiful mouth.

"You look skeptical," Mr. Goddard continued, gazing at her searchingly; "but let me tell you that you will find it no easy matter to prove the statements you have made—no person of common sense would credit your story."

"Indeed! But have you not already admitted that you received the certificate of which Mr. Forsyth told me?"

"Yes; but we have been here alone, with no witness to swear to what has passed between us. However, as I have already told you, Anna stole the paper from me years ago, and I have never seen it since."

"Yes, I know you told me so!"

"Do you not believe me?"

"I think my past relations with you have not served to establish a feeling of excessive confidence in you," was the quietly ironical response.

The man flushed hotly, while anger for the moment rendered him speechless.

"Possibly you might be able to induce your—companion to surrender the document," the lady added, after a minute of awkward silence.

Gerald Goddard gnawed his under lip in impotent wrath at this sarcastic reference to the woman who had shared his life for so many years; while the wretched eavesdropper herself barely suppressed a moan of passionate anguish.

"You have very little idea of Anna's spirit, if you imagine that she would ever yield one jot to you," Mr. Goddard at length retorted, his face crimson with rage.

Isabel Stewart arose from her chair and stood calm and cold before him.

She gazed with a steady, searching look into his eyes, then remarked, with slow emphasis:

"She will never be asked to yield to me, and I am spared the necessity of suing to either of you, for—that all-important certificate of marriage is already in my possession."

As we know, Gerald Goddard had feared this; he had even suggested the possibility to Anna, on the night of the ball at Wyoming, when she told him of the disappearance of the paper.

Nevertheless, the announcement of the fact at this time came upon him like a thunderbolt, for which he was utterly unprepared.

"Zounds!" he cried, starting to his feet, as if electrified, "can you mean it? Then you stole it the night of the ball!"

"You are greatly mistaken, Mr. Goddard; it was in my possession before the night of the ball," quietly returned his companion.

"I do not believe it!" cried the man, excitedly.

"I will prove it to you if you desire," Mrs. Stewart remarked.

"I defy you to do so."

"Very well; I accept your gage. You will, however, have to excuse me for a few moments," and, with these few words, the stately and graceful woman turned and disappeared within a chamber that opened from the room they were in.

It would be difficult to describe the conflict of emotions that raged in Gerald Goddard's breast during her absence.

While he was almost beside himself with anger and chagrin, over the very precarious position in which he found himself, he was also tormented by intense disappointment and a sense of irritation to think he had so fatally marred his life by his heartless desertion of the beautiful woman who had just left him.

Anna was not to be compared with her; she was perhaps more brilliant and pronounced in her style; but she lacked the charm of refinement and sweet graciousness that characterized Isabel; while, more than all else, he lamented the

loss of the princely inheritance which had fallen to her, and which he would have shared if he had been true to her.

Ten minutes passed, and then he was aroused from his wretched reflections by the opening of the chamber door near him, when his late housekeeper at Wyoming walked into the room.



## **CHAPTER XXIX.**

## **"OUR WAYS PART HERE, NEVER TO CROSS AGAIN."**

Gerald Goddard arose from his chair, and stared at the woman in unfeigned astonishment.

"Really, Mrs. Weld! this is an unexpected meeting—I had no thought of seeing you here, or even that you were acquainted with Mrs. Stewart," he remarked, while he searched his recent housekeeper's face with curious eyes.

"I have known Isabel Haven all her life," the woman replied, without appearing in the least disconcerted by the gentleman's scrutiny.

"Can that be possible?" exclaimed her companion, but losing some of his color at the information.

"Yes."

"Then I presume you are familiar with her history."

"I am; with every item of it, from her cradle to the present hour."

"And were you aware of her presence in Boston when you applied for your position at Wyoming?"

"I was."

"Perchance it was at her instigation that you sought the place," Mr. Goddard remarked, a sudden suspicion making him feel sick at heart.

"Mrs. Stewart certainly knew that I was to have charge of your house," calmly responded Mrs. Weld.

"Then there was a plot between you—you had some deep-laid scheme in seeking the situation."

"I do not deny the charge, sir."

"What! do you boldly affirm it? What was your object?" demanded the man, in a towering rage, but growing deathly white at the explanation that suggested itself



to his mind.

"I perceive that you have your suspicions, Mr. Goddard," coolly remarked the woman, without losing an atom of her self-possession in view of his anger.

"I have. Great Heavens! I understand it all now," cried her companion, hoarsely. "It was you who stole that certificate from my wife's room!"

"Yes, sir; I was fortunate enough to find it, two days previous to the ball."

"You confess it!—you dare own it to me, madam! You are worse than a professional thief, and I will have you arrested for your crime!" and Gerald Goddard was almost beside himself with passion at her cool effrontery.

"I hardly think you will, Mr. Goddard," was the quiet response. "I imagine that you would hesitate to bring such a charge against me, since such a course would necessitate explanations that might be to you somewhat distasteful, if not mortifying. You would hardly like to reveal the character of the document, which, however, you have made a mistake in asserting that I stole—"

"But you have admitted the charge," he excitedly interposed.

"I beg your pardon, I have not acknowledged the crime of theft—I simply stated that I was fortunate enough to find the document in question."

"It seems to me that that is a distinction without a difference," he sneered.

"One can hardly be accused of stealing what rightly belongs to one's self," Mrs. Weld composedly said.

"What—what on earth can you mean? Explain yourself."

"Certainly; that is exactly what I came here to do," she answered, as, with a dexterous movement, she tore the glasses from her eyes, and swept the moles from her face, after which she snatched the cap and wig from her head, and stood before her companion revealed as Isabel Stewart herself.

"Good Heaven!" he gasped, then sank back upon his chair, staring in blank amazement at her.

Mrs. Stewart seized this opportunity to again slip from the room, and when she returned, a few minutes later, her superabundance of cellular tissue (?) had disappeared and she was her own peerless self once more.

She quietly resumed her seat, gravely remarking, as she did so:

"A woman who has been wronged as you have wronged me, Gerald Goddard, will risk a great deal to re-establish her good name. When I first learned of your whereabouts I thought I would go and boldly demand that certificate of you. I tried to meet you in society here, but, strange to say, I failed in this attempt, for, as it happened, neither you nor your—Anna Correlli frequented the places where I was entertained, although I did meet Monsieur Correlli two or three times. Then I saw that advertisement for a housekeeper to go out to Wyoming, to take charge of your house during a mid-winter frolic; and, prompted by a feeling of curiosity to learn something of your private life with the woman who had supplanted me, I conceived the idea of applying for the situation and thus trying to obtain that certificate by strategy. How did I know that it was you who advertised?" she interposed, as Mr. Goddard looked up inquiringly. "Because I chanced to overhear some one say that the Goddards were going out of town for the same purpose as that which your notice mentioned. So I disguised myself, as you have seen, went to your office, found I was right, and secured the position."

"Now I know why I was so startled that day, when you dropped your glasses in the dining-room," groaned the wretched man.

"Yes; I saw that you had never forgotten the eyes which you used to call your 'windows of paradise,'" responded his companion, with quiet irony, and Gerald Goddard shrank under the familiar smile as under a blow.

"Gerald," she went on, after a moment of painful silence, but with a note of pity pervading her musical tones, "a man can never escape the galling consciousness of wrong that he has done until he repents of it; even then the consequences of his sin must follow him through life. Yours was a nature of splendid possibilities; there was scarcely any height to which you might not have attained, had you lived up to your opportunities. You had wealth and position, and a physique such as few men possess; you were finely educated, and you were a superior artist. What have you to show for all this? what have you done with your God-given talents? how will you answer to Him, when He calls you to account for the gifts intrusted to your care? What excuse, also, will you give for the wreck you have made of two women's lives? You began all wrong; in the first place, you weakly yielded to the selfish gratification of your own pleasure; you lived upon the principle that you must have a good time, no matter who suffered in consequence—you must be amused, regardless of who or what was sacrificed to subserve that end—"

"You are very hard upon me, Isabel; I have been no worse than hundreds of other men in those respects," interposed Gerald Goddard, who smarted under her searching questions and scathing charges as under a lash.

"Granted that you 'are no worse than hundreds of other men,'" she retorted, with scornful emphasis, "and more's the pity. But how does that lessen the measure of your responsibility, pray tell me? There will come a time when each and every man must answer for himself. I have nothing to do with any one else, but I have the right to call you to account for the selfishness and sins which have had such a baneful influence upon my life; I have the right, by reason of all that I have suffered at your hands—by the broken heart of my youth—the loss of my self-respect—the despair which so nearly drove me to crime—and, more than all else, by that terrible renunciation that deprived me of my child, that innocent baby whom I loved with no ordinary affection—I say I have the right to arraign you in the sight of Heaven and of your own conscience, and to make one last attempt to save you, if you will be saved."

"What do you care—what does it matter to you now whether I am saved or lost?" the man huskily demanded, and in a tone of intense bitterness, for her solemn words had pierced his heart like a double-edged dagger.

"I care because you are a human being, with a soul that must live eternally—because I am striving to serve One who has commanded us to follow Him in seeking to save that which is lost," the fair woman gravely replied. "Look at yourself, Gerald—your inner self, I mean. Outwardly you are a specimen of God's noblest handiwork. How does your spiritual self compare with your physical frame?—has it attained the same perfection? No; it has become so dwarfed and misshapen by your indulgence in sin and vice—so hardened by yielding to so-called 'pleasure,' your intellect so warped, your talents so misapplied that even your Maker would scarcely recognize the being that He Himself had brought into existence. You are forty-nine years old, Gerald—you may have ten, twenty, even thirty more to live. How will you spend them? Will you go on as you have been living for almost half a century, or is there still a germ of good within you that you will have strength and resolution to develop, as far as may be, toward that perfect symmetry which God desires every human soul to attain? Think!—choose! Make this hour the turning point in your career; go back to your painting, retrieve your skill, and work to some purpose and for some worthy object. If you do not need the money such work will bring, for your own support, use it for the good of others—of those unfortunate ones, perchance, whose lives have been blighted, as mine was blighted, by those 'hundreds of

other men' like you."

As the beautiful woman concluded her earnest appeal, the conscience-smitten man dropped his head upon the table beside which he sat, and groaned aloud.

For the first time in his life he saw himself as he was, and loathed himself, his past life, and all the alluring influences that had conspired to decoy him into the downward path which he had trodden.

"I will! I will! Oh, Isabel, forgive and help me," he pleaded, in a voice thrilling with despair.

"I help you?" she repeated, in an inquiring tone, in which there was a note of surprise.

"Yes, with your sweet counsel, your pure example and influence."

"I do not understand you, quite," she responded, her lovely color waning as a suspicion of his meaning began to dawn upon her.

He raised his face, which was drawn and haggard from the remorse he was suffering, and looked appealingly into hers. But, as he met the gaze of her pure, grave eyes, a flush of shame mounted to his brow as he realized how despicable he must appear to her in now suing so humbly for what he had once trampled under foot as worthless.

Yet an unspeakable yearning to regain her love had taken possession of him, and every other emotion was, for the moment, surmounted by that.

"I mean, come back to me! try to love me again! and let me, under the influence of your sweet presence, your precepts and noble example, strive to become the man you have described, and that, at last, my own heart yearns to be."

His plea was like the cry of a despairing soul, who realized, all too late, the fatal depths of the pit into which he had voluntarily plunged.

Isabel Stewart saw this, and pitied him, as she would have pitied any other human being who had become so lost to all honor and virtue; but his suggestion, his appeal that she would go back to him, live with him, associate with him from day to day, was so repulsive to her that she could not quite repress her aversion, and a slight shiver ran over her frame, so chilling that all her color faded, even from her lips; and Gerald Goddard, seeing it, realized the hopelessness of his

desire even before she could command herself sufficiently to answer him.

"That would not be possible, Gerald," she finally replied. "Truth compels me to tell you plainly that whatever affection I may once have entertained for you has become an emotion of the past; it was killed outright when I believed myself a deserted outcast in Rome. I should do sinful violence to my own heart and nature if I should heed your request, and also become but a galling reproach to you, rather than a help."

"Then you repudiate me utterly, in spite of the fact that the law yet binds us to each other? I am no more to you than any other human being?" groaned the humbled man.

"Only in the sense that through you I have keenly suffered," she gravely returned.

"Then there is no hope for me," he whispered, hoarsely, as his head sank heavily upon his breast.

"You are mistaken, Gerald," his companion responded, with sweet solemnity; "there is every hope for you—the same hope and promise that our Master held out to the woman whom the Pharisees were about to stone to death when he interfered to save her. I presume to cast no revengeful 'stone' at you. I do not arrogantly condemn you. I simply say as he said, 'Go and sin no more.'"

"Oh, Isabel, have mercy! With you to aid me, I could climb to almost any height," cried the broken-spirited man, throwing out his hands in despairing appeal.

"I am more merciful in my rejection of your proposal than I could possibly be in acceding to it," she answered. "You broke every moral tie and obligation that bound me to you when you left me and my child to amuse yourself with another. Legally, I suppose, I am still your wife, but I can never recognize the bond; henceforth, I can be nothing but a stranger to you, though I wish you no ill, and would not lift my hand against you in any way—"

"Do you mean by that that you would not even bring mortification or scandal upon me by seeking to publicly prove the legality of our marriage?" Mr. Goddard interposed, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, I mean just that. Since the certificate is in my possession, and I have the power to vindicate myself, in case any question regarding the matter arises in the

future, I am content."

"But I thought—I supposed—Will you not even use it to obtain a divorce from me?" stammered the man, who suddenly remembered a certain rumor regarding a distinguished gentleman's devotion to the beautiful Mrs. Stewart.

"No; death alone can break the tie that binds me to you," she returned, her lovely lips contracting slightly with pain.

"What! Have you no wish to be free?" he questioned, regarding her with astonishment.

"Yes, I would be very glad to feel that no fetters bound me," she answered, with clouded eyes; "but I vowed to be true as long as life should last, and I will never break my word."

"True!" repeated her companion, bitterly.

A flush of indignation mounted to the beautiful woman's brow at the reproach implied in his word and tone.

But she controlled the impulse to make an equally scathing retort, and remarked, with a quiet irony that was tenfold more effective.

"Well, if that word offends you, I will qualify it so far as to say that, at least, I have never dishonored my marriage vows; I never will dishonor them."

Gerald Goddard threw out his hands with a gesture of torture, and for a moment he became deathly white, showing how keenly his companion's arrow had pierced his conscience.

There was a painful silence of several moments, and then he inquired, in constrained tones:

"What, then, is my duty? What relations must I henceforth sustain toward—Anna?"

"I cannot be conscience for you, Gerald," said Isabel Stewart, coldly; "at least, I could offer no suggestion regarding such a matter as that. I can only live out my own life as my heart and judgment of what is right and wrong approve; but if you have no scruples on that score—if you desire to institute proceedings for a divorce, in order to repair, as far as may be, the wrong you have also done Anna Correlli—I shall lay no obstacle in your way."

She arose as she ceased speaking, thus intimating that she desired the interview to terminate.

"And that is all you have to say to me? Oh, Isabel!" Gerald Goddard gasped, and realizing how regally beautiful she had become, how infinitely superior, physically and morally, spiritually and intellectually, she was to the woman for whose sake he had trampled her in the dust. And the fact was forced upon him that she was one to be worshiped for her sweet graciousness and purity of character—to be revered for her innate nobility and stanch adherence to principle, and to be exultantly proud of, could he have had the right to be—as a queen among women.

"That is all," she replied, with slow thoughtfulness, "unless, as a woman who is deeply interested in the moral advancement of humanity in general, I urge you once more to make your future better than your past has been, that thus the world may be benefited, in ever so slight a measure, because you have lived. As for you and me, our ways part here, never to cross again, I trust; for, while I have ceased to grieve over the blighted hopes of my youth, it would be painful to be reminded of my early mistakes."

"Part—forever? I do not feel that I can have it so," said Gerald Goddard, with white lips, "for—I love you at this moment a thousand times more than I ever—"

"Stop!" Isabel Stewart firmly commanded. "Such an avowal from you at this time is but an added insult to me, as well as a cowardly wrong against her who, in the eyes of the world, at least, has sustained the relationship of wife to you for many years."

The head of the proud man dropped before her with an air of humility entirely foreign to the "distinguished" Gerald Goddard whom the world knew; but, though crushed by a sense of shame and grief, he could but own to himself that her condemnation was just, and the faint hope that had sprung up in his heart died, then and there, its tragic death.



## **CHAPTER XXX.**



## **"I HATE YOU WITH ALL THE STRENGTH OF MY ITALIAN BLOOD."**

Isabel Stewart felt that she could not bear the painful interview any longer, and was about to touch the electric button to summon her servant to show her visitor out, when he stayed her with a gesture of appeal.

"One moment more, Isabel, I implore," he exclaimed; "then I will go, never to trouble you again."

Her beautiful hand dropped by her side, and she turned again to him with a patient, inquiring glance.

"You have spoken of our—child," the man went on, eagerly, though a flush of shame dyed his face as he gave utterance to the pronoun denoting mutual possession. "Do you intend to continue your search for her?"

"Certainly; that will now be the one aim of my life. I could never take another moment of comfort knowing that my old friend and my child were destitute, as I have been led to believe they are."

"And if—you find her—shall—you tell her—your history?" faltered Gerald Goddard, as he nervously moistened his dry lips.

His companion bent her head in thought for a moment. At length she remarked:

"I shall, of course, be governed somewhat by circumstances in such a matter; if I find Edith still in ignorance of the fact that she is an adopted daughter, I think I shall never undeceive her, but strive to be content with such love as she can give me, as her mother's friend. If, on the other hand, I find that she has learned the truth—especially if she should happen to be alone in the world—I shall take her into my arms and tell her the whole story of my life, beg her to share my future, and let me try to win as much as possible of her love."

"If you should find her, pray, pray do not teach her to regard me as a monster of all that is evil," pleaded her companion, in a tone of agony that was pitiful. "Ah, Isabel, I believe I should have been a better man if I could have had the love of little children thrown about me as a safeguard."

Isabel Stewart's red lips curled with momentary scorn at this attempt to shift the responsibility of his wasted and misguided life upon any one or anything rather than himself.

"What a pity, then, that you did not realize the fact before you discarded the unhappy young mother and her innocent babe, so many years ago," she remarked, in a tone that pierced his heart like a knife.

"I did go back to Rome for the child—I did try to find her after—I had heard that—that you were gone," he faltered. "I was told that the infant had doubtless perished with you, though its body was never found; but I have mourned her—I have yearned for her all my life."

"And do you imagine, even if you should meet her some time in the future, that she would reciprocate this affection which, strangely enough, you manifest at this late day?"

"Perhaps not, if you should meet her first and tell her your story," the man returned, with a heavy sigh.

"Which I shall assuredly do," said Mrs. Stewart, resolutely; "that is, if, as I said before, I find her alone in the world; that much justification is my due—my child shall know the truth; then she shall be allowed to act according to the dictates of her own heart and judgment, regarding her future relationship toward both of us. I feel sure that she has been most carefully reared—that my old friend Edith would instill only precepts of truth and purity in her mind, and my heart tells me that she would be likely to shrink from one who had wronged her mother as you have wronged me."

"I see; you will keep her from me if you can," said Mr. Goddard, with intense bitterness.

"I am free to confess that I should prefer you never to meet," said Mrs. Stewart, a look of pain sweeping over her beautiful face; "but Edith is twenty years of age, if she is living; and if, after learning my history, she desires to recognize the relationship between herself and you, I can, of course, but submit to her wish."

"It is very evident to me that you will teach her to hate her father," was the sullen retort.

"Her father?" the term was repeated with infinite scorn. "Pray in what respect have you shown yourself worthy to be so regarded?—you who even denied her

legitimate birth, and turned your back upon her, totally indifferent to whether she starved or not."

"How hard you are upon me, Isabel!"

"I have told you only facts."

"I know—I know; but have some pity for me now, since, at last, I have come to my senses; for in my heart I have an insatiable longing for this daughter who, if she is living, must embody some of the virtues of her mother, who—God help me!—is lost, lost to me forever!"

The man's voice died away in a hoarse whisper, while a heart-broken sob burst from his lips.

"Go, Gerald," said Mrs. Stewart, in a low, but not unkindly imperative tone; "it is better that this interview should terminate. The past is past—nothing can change it; but the future will be what we make it. Go, and if I ever hear from you again, let me know that your present contrition has culminated in a better life."

She turned abruptly from him and disappeared within her chamber, quietly shutting the door after her, while Gerald Goddard arose to "go" as he had been bidden.

As, with tottering gait and a pale, despairing face, he crossed the room and parted the draperies between the two pretty parlors, he found himself suddenly confronted by a woman so wan and haggard that, for an instant, he failed to recognize her.

"Idiot!" hissed Anna Correlli, through her pallid, tightly-drawn lips; "traitor! coward! viper!"

She was forced to pause simply because she was exhausted from the venom which she had expended in the utterance of those four expletives.

Then she sank, weak and faint, upon a chair, but with her eyes glittering like points of flame, fastened in a look of malignant hatred upon the astonished man.

"Anna! how came you here?—how long have you been here?" he finally found voice to say.

"Long enough to learn of the contemptible perfidy and meanness of the man whom, for twenty years, I have trusted," she panted, but the tone was so hollow

he never would have known who was speaking had he not seen her.

He opened his dry lips to make some reply; but no sound came from them.

He put out his hand to support himself by the back of her chair, for all his strength and sense seemed on the point of failing him; while for the moment he felt as if he could almost have been grateful to any one who would slay him where he stood, and thus put him out of his misery—benumb his sense of degradation and the remorse which he experienced for his wasted life, and the wrongs of which he had been guilty.

But, by a powerful effort, he soon mastered himself, for he was anxious to escape from the house before the presence of his wife should be discovered.

"Come, Anna," he said; "let us go home, where we can talk over this matter by ourselves, without the fear of being overheard."

He attempted to assist her to rise, but she shrank away from him with a gesture of aversion, at the same time flashing a look up at him that almost seemed to curdle his blood, and sent a shudder of dread over him.

"Do not dare to touch me!" she cried, hoarsely. "Go—call a carriage; I am not able to walk. Go; I will follow you."

Without a word, he turned to obey her, and passed quickly out of the suite without encountering any one, she following, but with a gait so unsteady that any one watching her would have been tempted to believe her under the influence of some intoxicant.

Mr. Goddard found a carriage standing near the entrance to the hotel, and they were soon on their way home.

Not a word was spoken by either during the ride, and it would have been impossible to have found two more utterly wretched people in all that great city.

Upon entering their house, they found Emil Correlli in a state bordering on frenzy, occasioned by the escape of Edith, and this circumstance served for a few moments to distract their thoughts from their own troubles.

Mr. Goddard was intensely relieved by the intelligence, and plainly betrayed it in his manner.

When angrily called to account for it by his brother-in-law, he at once replied,

with an air of reckless defiance:

"Yes, I am glad of it—I would even have helped the girl to get away; indeed, I was planning to do so, for such a dastardly fraud as you perpetrated upon her should never be allowed to prosper."

He was rewarded for this speech, so loyal to Edith, only by an angry oath, to which, however, he paid no attention.

Strangely enough, Anna Correlli, after the first emotion of surprise and dismay had passed, paid no heed to the exciting conversation; she had sunk into a chair by the window, where she sat pale and silent, and absolutely motionless, save for the wild restlessness of her fiery black eyes.

Mr. Goddard, finding the atmosphere so disagreeable, finally left the room, and, mounting the stairs, shut himself in his own chamber, while the enraged lover dashed out of the house to the nearest telegraph office to send the message that caused the policeman to intercept Edith upon her arrival in New York.

A few moments later, Mrs. Goddard—as we will, from courtesy, still call her—crept wearily up to her room, where, tottering to a couch, she threw herself prone upon her face, moaning and shivering with the agony she could no longer control.

The blow, which for twenty years she had been dreading, had fallen at last; but it was far more crushing and bitter than she had ever dreamed it could be.

She had come at last to the dregs of the cup which once had seemed so sweet and alluring to her senses, and they had poisoned her soul unto death.

She knew that never again while she lived would she be able to face the world and hide her misery beneath a mask of smiles; and the bitterest drop of all, the sharpest thorn in her lacerated heart, was the fact that the little insignificant girl who had once been her hated rival in Rome, should have developed into the peerlessly beautiful woman, whom all men admired and revered, and whom Gerald Goddard now idolized.

An hour passed, during which she lay where she had fallen and almost benumbed by her misery.

Then there came a knock upon her door, which was immediately opened, and Mr. Goddard entered the room.

He was still very pale, but grave and self-contained.

The woman started to a sitting posture, exclaiming, in an unnatural voice:

"What do you want here?"

"I have come, Anna, to talk over with you the events of the morning—to ask you to try to control yourself, and look at our peculiar situation with calmness and practical common sense," he calmly replied.

"Well?" was all the response vouchsafed, as he paused an instant.

"I have not come to offer any excuses for myself, or for what you overheard this morning," he thoughtfully resumed; "indeed, I have none to offer—my whole life, I own, has, as Isabel rightly said, been a failure thus far, and no one save myself is to blame for the fact. Do not sneer, Anna," he interposed, as her lips curled back from her dazzling teeth, which he saw were tightly locked with the effort she was making at self-control. "I have been thoroughly humiliated for the first time in my life—I have been made to see myself as I am, and I have reached a point where I am willing to make an effort to atone, as far as may be, for some of the wrongs of which I have been guilty. Will you help me, Anna?"

Again he paused, but this time his companion did not deign to avail herself of the opportunity to reply, if, indeed, she was able to do so.

She had not once removed her glittering eyes from his face, and her steady, inscrutable look gave him an uncanny sensation that was anything but agreeable.

"I have come to propose that we avail ourselves of the only remedy that seems practicable to relieve our peculiar situation," he continued, seeing she was waiting for him to go on. "I will apply to have the tie which binds me to Isabel annulled, with all possible secrecy—it can be done in the West without any notoriety; then I will make you my legal wife, as you have so often asked me to do, and we will go abroad again, where we will try to live out the remainder of our lives to some better purpose than we have done heretofore. I ask you again, will you try to help me? It is not going to be an easy thing at first; but if each will try, for the sake of the other, I believe we can yet attain comparative content, if not positive happiness."

"Content! happiness!"

The words were hissed out with a fierceness of passion that startled him, and

caused him to regard her anxiously.

"Happiness!" she repeated. "Ha! ha! What mockery in the sound of that word from your lips, after what has occurred to-day!"

"I know that you have cause to be both grieved and angry, Anna," said Gerald Goddard, humbly; "but let us both put the past behind us—let us wipe out all old scores, and from this day begin a new life."

"'Begin a new life' upon a heap of ashes, without one spark among them to ignite the smallest flame!" was the mocking rejoinder. Then, with a burst of agony, she continued: "Oh, God! if you had taken a dagger and stabbed me to death in that room to-day, you could not have slain me more effectually than by the words you have uttered. Begin a new life with you, after your confessions, your pleadings and protestations to Isabel Stewart? Heaven! Never! I hate you! hate you; hate you! with all the strength of my Italian blood, and warn you—beware! And now, begone!"

The woman looked like a maniac as she poured this wild torrent upon him, and the man saw that she was in no mood to be reasoned with or to consider any subject; that it would be wiser to wait until the fierceness of her anger had spent itself.

He had broached the matter of their future relations, thus giving her something to think of, and now he would leave her to meditate upon it by herself; perhaps, in a few days, she would be in a more reasonable frame of mind, and look at the subject from a different point of view.

"Very well, Anna," he said, as he arose, "I will obey you. I do not pretend to claim that I have not given you cause to feel aggrieved in many respects; but, as I have already said, that is past. I simply ask you to do what I also will do—put all the old life behind us, and begin over again. I realize that we cannot discuss the question to any purpose now—we are both too wrought up to think or talk calmly, so I will leave you to rest, and we will speak of this at another time. Can I do anything for you before I go?—or perhaps you would like your maid sent to you?"

"No," she said, briefly, and not once having removed her wild eyes from his face while he was speaking.

He bowed, and passed out of the room, softly shutting the door after him, then

walked slowly down the hall to his own apartment.

The moment he was gone Anna Goddard sprang like a cat to her feet.

Going to her writing-desk, she dashed off a few lines, which she hastily folded and slipped into an envelope, which she sealed and addressed.

She then touched the electric button above her desk to summon her maid, after which she sat motionless with the missive clasped in her hands until the girl appeared.

"Dress yourself for the street, Mary, and take this note to Mr. Clayton's office. Be quick about it, for it is a matter of importance," she commanded, while she forced herself to speak with outward calmness.

But Mary regarded her mistress with wonder, for, in all her "tantrums," as she termed them, she had never seen the awful look upon her face which was stamped upon it at that moment.

But she took the note without comment, and hastened away upon her errand, while Mrs. Goddard, throwing herself back in her chair, sat there waiting with an air of expectation that betrayed she was looking for the appearance of some one.

Half an hour later a gentleman was admitted to the house, and was shown directly up to my lady's boudoir.





## **CHAPTER XXXI.**

## RECORDS SOME STARTLING DEVELOPMENTS.

The gentleman caller referred to in the last chapter was closeted with Mrs. Goddard for fully two hours, when he quietly left the house.

A few moments later, however, he returned, accompanied by two other men—clerks from a neighboring drug store—whom he admitted with a latch-key, and then conducted them up to Mrs. Goddard's boudoir.

The strangers did not remain long; whatever their errand, it was soon finished, and they departed as silently as they had come.

Mr. Clayton remained some time longer, conversing with the mistress of the house, but their business being finally concluded, he also went away, bearing a package of papers with him.

Emil Correlli returned just in season for dinner, which, however, he was obliged to partake of alone, as Mr. and Mrs. Goddard did not make their appearance at the table.

The young man paid slight heed to ceremony, but after eating a hasty meal, sought his sister and informed her that he was going to start for New York on the late evening train.

The woman gave him one wild, startled glance, and seemed strangely agitated for a moment over his announcement.

He could not fail to notice her emotion, and that she was excessively pale.

"You look like a ghost, Anna," he remarked, as he searched her face with some anxiety. "What is the matter with you? I fear you are going to be ill."

"I am ill," she said, in a hoarse, unnatural tone.

"Then let me call your physician," said her brother, eagerly. "I am going out immediately, and will leave a message for him."

"No, no," she nervously replied; then with a hollow laugh that smote heavily upon her companion's heart, she added: "My case is beyond the reach of Dr. Hunt or any other physician."

"Anna, have you been quarreling with Gerald again?"

"Yes," was the brief response.

"Well, of course I can understand that such matters are beyond the skill of any physician," said the young man, with a half-impatient shrug of his shoulders; "neither have I any business to interfere between you," he added; "but my advice would be to make it up as soon as possible, and then try to live peaceably in the future. I do not like to leave you looking so white and miserable, but I must go. Take good care of yourself, and I shall hope to find you better and happier when I return."

He bent down to give her a farewell caress, and was amazed by the passion she manifested in returning it.

She threw her arms around his neck and held him in a convulsive embrace, while she quivered from head to foot with repressed emotion.

She did not utter one word of farewell, but a wild sob burst from her; then, as if she could bear no more, she pushed him from her and rushed into her chamber, shutting and locking the door behind her.

Emil Correlli left the boudoir, a puzzled expression on his handsome face; for, although his sister was subject to strange attacks, he had never seen her like this before.

"Anna will come to grief some day with that cursed temper of hers," he muttered, as he went to his room to pack his portmanteau, but he was too intent upon his own affairs to dwell long upon even the trouble of his sister, and a couple of hours later was on his way to New York to begin his search for his runaway bride.

The next morning Mrs. Goddard was "too ill to rise," she told her maid, when she came at the usual hour to her door. She would not admit her, but sent word to her husband that she could not join him at breakfast.

He went up later to see if she would allow him to call a physician for her, but she would not see him, simply telling him she "would do well enough without advice—all she needed was rest, and she did not wish to be disturbed by any one until she rang."

Feeling deeply disappointed and depressed by her unusual obstinacy, the

wretched man went downstairs and shut himself into the library, where he remained all day, while there was such an atmosphere of loneliness and desolation about the house that even the servants appeared to feel it, and went about with solemn faces and almost stealthy steps.

Could any one have looked behind those closed doors he could not have failed to have experienced a feeling of pity for the man; for if ever a human being went down into the valley of humiliation, Gerald Goddard sounded its uttermost depths, while he battled alone with all the powers of evil that beset his soul.

When night came he was utterly exhausted, and sought his couch, looking at least ten years older than he had appeared forty-eight hours previous.

He slept heavily and dreamlessly, and did not awake till late, when an imperative knock upon the door and a voice, calling in distress, caused him to spring suddenly from his bed, and impressed him with a sense of impending evil.

"What is it, Mary?" he inquired, upon recognizing the voice of his wife's maid.

"Oh, sir! come—come to madam; she is very ill!" cried the girl, in a frightened tone.

"I will be there immediately. Send James for the doctor, and then go back to her," commanded her master, as he hurriedly began to dress.

Five minutes later he was in his wife's room, to find her lying upon the lounge, just as he had seen her thirty-six hours previous.

It was evident that she had not been in bed at all for two nights, for she still had on the same dress that she had worn at the Copley Square Hotel.

But the shadow of death was on her white face; her eyes were glazed, and though only partially closed, it was evident that she saw nothing.

She was still breathing, but faintly and irregularly. Her hands were icy cold, and at the base of the nails there was the unmistakable purple tint that indicated approaching dissolution.

Gerald Goddard was shocked beyond measure to find her thus, but he arose to the occasion.

With his own hands and the assistance of the maid, he removed her clothing, then wrapped her in blankets and put her in bed, when he called for hot water

bottles to place around her, hoping thus by artificial heat to quicken the sluggish circulation and her failing pulses.

But apparently there was no change in her, and when the physician came and made his examination, he told them plainly that "no effort could avail; it was a case of sudden heart failure, and the end was but a question of moments."

Mr. Goddard was horrified and stricken with remorse at the hopeless verdict, for it seemed to him that he was in a measure accountable for the untimely shock which was fast depriving of life this woman who had loved him so passionately, though unwisely.

He put his lips to her ear and called her by name.

"Anna! Anna! You must try to arouse yourself," he cried, in a voice of agony.

At first the appeal seemed to produce no effect, but after several attempts he thought he detected a gleam of intelligence in the almost sightless eyes, while the cold fingers resting on his hand made an effort to close over his.

These slight signs convinced him that though she was past the power of speech, she yet knew him and clung to him, in spite of the clutch which the relentless enemy of all mankind had laid upon her.

"Doctor, she knows me!" he exclaimed. "Pray give her some stimulant to arouse her dormant faculties, if only for a moment."

"I fear it will be of no use," the physician replied, "but I will try."

He hurriedly prepared and administered a powerful restorative; then they waited with breathless interest for several moments for some sign of improvement.

It came at last; she began to breathe a trifle more regularly; the set features became a little less rigid, and the pulse a shade stronger, until finally the white lids were lifted and the dying woman turned her eyes with a pitiful expression of appeal upon the man whom, even in death, she still adored.

"Leave us alone!" commanded Gerald Goddard, in a hoarse whisper, and physician and servants stole noiselessly from the room.

"Anna, you know me—you understand what I am saying?" the wretched man then questioned.

A slight pressure from the cold fingers was the only reply.

"You know that you are dying?" he pursued.

Again that faint sign of assent.

"Then, dear, let us be at peace before you go," he pleaded, gently. "My soul bows in humiliation and remorse before you; for years I have wronged you. I wronged you in those first days in Rome. I have no excuse to offer. I simply tell you that my spirit is crushed within me as I look back and realize all that I am accountable for. I would have been glad to atone, as far as was in my power, could you have lived to share my future. Give me some sign of forgiveness to tell me that you retract those last bitter words of hate—to let me feel that in this final moment we part in peace."

At his pleading a look of agony dawned in the woman's failing eyes—a look so pitiful in its yearning and despair that the strong man broke down and sobbed from sorrow and contrition; but the sign he had begged for was not given.

"Oh, Anna! pray show me, in some way, that you will not die hating me," he pleaded. "Forgive—oh, forgive!"

At those last words those almost palsied fingers closed convulsively over his; the look of agony in those dusky orbs was superseded by one of adoration and tenderness; a faint expression of something like peace crept into the tense lines about the drawn mouth, and the repentant watcher knew that she would not go out into the great unknown bearing in her heart a relentless hatred against him.

That effort was the last flicker of the expiring flame, for the white lids drooped over the dark eyes; the cold fingers relaxed their hold, and Gerald Goddard knew the end had almost come.

He touched the bell, and the physician instantly re-entered the room.

"It is almost over," he remarked, as he went to the bedside, and his practiced fingers sought her pulse.

Even as he spoke her breast heaved once—then again, and all was still.

Who shall describe the misery that surged over Gerald Goddard's soul as he looked upon the still form and realized that the grandly beautiful woman, who for twenty years had reigned over his home, was no more—that never again

would he hear her voice, either in words of fond adoration or in passionate anger; never see her again, arrayed in the costly apparel and gleaming jewels which she so loved, mingling with the gay people of the world, or graciously entertaining guests in her own house?

He felt almost like a murderer; for, in spite of Dr. Hunt's verdict that she had died of "sudden heart failure," he feared that the proud woman had been so crushed by what she had overheard in Isabel Stewart's apartments that she had voluntarily ended her life.

It was only a dim suspicion—a vague impression, for there was not the slightest evidence of anything of the kind, and he would never dare to give voice to it to any human being; nevertheless, it pressed heavily upon his soul with a sense of guilt that was almost intolerable.

A message was immediately sent flying over the wires to New York to inform Emil Correlli of the sad news, and eight hours later he was back in Boston crushed for the time by the loss of the sister for whom he entertained perhaps the purest love of which his selfish heart was capable of experiencing.

We will not dwell upon the harrowing events of the next few days.

Suffice it to say that society, or that portion of it that had known the brilliant Mrs. Goddard, was greatly shocked by the sudden death of one of its "brightest ornaments," and gracefully mourned her by covering her costly casket with choicest flowers; then closed up its ranks and went its way, trying to forget the pale charger which they knew would come again and again upon his grim errand.

The day following Anna Correlli's interment in Forest Hill Cemetery, Mr. Goddard and his brother-in-law were waited upon by the well-known lawyer, Arthur Clayton, who informed them that he had an important communication to make to them.

"Two days previous to her death I received this note from Mrs. Goddard," he remarked, at the same time handing a daintily perfumed missive to the elder gentleman. "In it you will observe that she asks me to come to her immediately. I obeyed her, and found her looking very ill, and seemingly greatly distressed in body and mind. She told me she was impressed that she had not long to live—that she had an affection of the heart that warned her to put her affairs in order. She desired me to draw up a will at once, according to her instructions, and have

it signed and witnessed before I left the house. I did so, calling in at her request two witnesses from a neighboring drug store, after which she gave the will into my keeping, to be retained until her death. This is the document, gentlemen," he remarked, in conclusion, "and here, also, is another communication, which she wrote herself and directed me to hand to you, sir."

He arose and passed both the will and the letter to Mr. Goddard, who had seemed greatly agitated while he was speaking.

He simply took the letter, remarking:

"Since you are already acquainted with the contents of the will, sir, will you kindly read it aloud in our presence?"

Mr. Clayton flushed slightly as he bowed acquiescence.

The document proved to be very short and to the point, and bequeathed everything that the woman had possessed—"excepting what the law would allow as Gerald Goddard's right"—to her beloved brother, Emil Correlli, who was requested to pay the servants certain amounts which she named.

That was all, and Mr. Goddard knew that in the heat of her anger against him she had made this rash disposition of her property—as she had the right to do, since it had all been settled upon her—to be revenged upon him by leaving him entirely dependent upon his own resources.

At first he experienced a severe shock at her act, for the thought of poverty was anything but agreeable to him.

He had lived a life of idleness and pleasure for so many years that it would not be an easy matter for him to give up the many luxuries to which he had been accustomed without a thought or care concerning their cost.

But after the first feeling of dismay had passed, a sense of relief took possession of him; for, with his suspicions regarding the cause of Anna's death, he knew that he could never have known one moment of comfort in living upon her fortune, even had she left it unreservedly to him rather than to her brother.

Emil Correlli was made sole executor of the estate; and, as there was nothing further for Mr. Clayton to do after reading the will, he quietly took his departure leaving the two men to discuss it at their leisure.





## **CHAPTER XXXII.**

## **"YOU WILL VACATE THESE PREMISES AT YOUR EARLIEST CONVENIENCE."**

"Well, Gerald, I must confess this is rather tough on you!" Monsieur Correlli remarked, in a voice of undisguised astonishment, as soon as the lawyer disappeared. "I call it downright shabby of Anna to have left you so in the lurch."

"It does not matter," returned the elder man, but somewhat coldly; for, despite his feeling of relief over the disposition of her property, he experienced a twinge of jealousy toward the more fortunate heir, whose pity was excessively galling to him under the circumstances.

Although the two men had quarreled just before Monsieur Correlli's departure for New York, all ill-feeling had been ignored in view of their common loss and sorrow, and each had conducted himself with a courteous bearing toward the other during the last few days.

"What in the world do you suppose possessed her to make such a will?" the young man inquired, while he searched his companion's face with keen scrutiny. "And how strange that she should have imagined all of a sudden that she was going to die, and so put her affairs in order!"

Mr. Goddard saw that he had no suspicion of the real state of things, and he had no intention of betraying any secrets if he could avoid doing so.

No one—not even her own brother—should ever know that Anna had not been his wife. He would do what he could to shield her memory from every reproach, and no one should ever dream that—he could not divest himself of the suspicion—she had died willfully.

Therefore, he replied with apparent frankness:

"I think I can explain why she did so. On the day of our return from Wyoming, Anna and I had a more serious quarrel than usual; I never saw her so angry as she was at that time; she even went so far as to tell me that she hated me; and so, I presume, in the heat of her anger, she resolved to cut me off with the proverbial shilling to be revenged upon me."

"Well, she has done so with a vengeance," muttered his brother-in-law.

"I went to her afterward and tried to make it up," his companion resumed, "but she would have nothing to say to me. She was looking very ill, also; and when the next morning she sent me word that she was not able to join me at breakfast, I went again to her door and begged her to allow me to send for Dr. Hunt, but she would not even admit me."

"What was this quarrel about?"

"Oh, almost all our quarrels have been about a certain document which has long been a bone of contention between us, and this one was an outgrowth from the same subject."

"Was that document a certificate of marriage?" craftily inquired Emil Correlli.

"Yes."

"Gerald, were you ever really married to Anna?" demanded the young man, bending toward him with an eager look.

His companion flushed hotly at the question, and yet it assured him that he did not really know just what relations his sister had sustained toward him.

"Isn't that a very singular question, Emil?" he inquired, with a cool dignity that was very effective. "What led you to ask it?"

"Something that Anna herself once said to me suggested the thought," Emil replied. "I know, of course, the circumstances of your early attachment—that for her you left another woman whom you had taken to Rome. I once asked Anna the same question, but she would not answer me directly—she evaded it in a way to confirm my suspicions rather than to allay them. And now this will—it seems very strange that she should have made it if—"

"Pray, Emil, do not distress yourself over anything so absurd," coldly interposed Gerald Goddard, but with almost hueless lips. "However, if you continue to entertain doubts upon the subject, you have but to go to the Church of the ——— the next time you visit Rome, ask to see the records for the year 18—, and you will find the marriage of your sister duly recorded there."

"I beg your pardon," apologized the doubter, now fully reassured by the above shrewdly fashioned answer, "but Anna was always so infernally jealous of you,

and made herself so wretched over the fear of losing your affection, that I could think of no other reason for her foolishness. Now, about this will," he added, hastily changing the subject and referring to the document. "I don't feel quite right to have all Anna's fortune, in addition to my own, and no doubt the poor girl would have repented of her rash act if she could have lived long enough to get over her anger and realize what she was doing. I don't need the money, and, Gerald, I am willing to make over something to you, especially as I happen to know that you have sunk the most of your money in unfortunate speculations," the young man concluded, Mr. Goddard's sad, white face appealing to his generosity in spite of their recent difference.

"Thank you, Emil," he quietly replied; "but I cannot accept your very kind offer. Since it was Anna's wish that you should have her property, I prefer that the will should stand exactly as she made it. I cannot take a dollar of the money—not even what 'the law would allow' in view of our relations to each other."

Those last words were uttered in a tone of peculiar bitterness that caused Monsieur Correlli to regard him curiously.

"Pray do not take it to heart like that, old boy," he said, kindly, after a moment, "and let me persuade you to accept at least a few thousands."

"Thank you, but I cannot. Please do not press the matter, for my decision is unalterable."

"But how the deuce are you going to get along?" questioned the young man.

"I shall manage very well," was the grave rejoinder. "I have a few hundreds which will suffice for my present needs, and, if my hands have not lost their cunning, I can abundantly provide for my future by means of my profession. By the way, what are your own plans?—if I may inquire," he concluded, to change the subject.

The young man paled at the question, and an angry frown settled upon his brow.

"I am going to return immediately to New York—I am bound to find that girl," he said, with an air of sullen resolution.

"Then you were not successful in your search?" Mr. Goddard remarked, dropping his lids to hide the flash of satisfaction that leaped into his eyes at the words.

"No, and yes. I found out that she arrived safely in New York, where she was met by a young lawyer—Royal Bryant by name—who immediately spirited her away to some place after dodging the policeman I had set on her track. I surmise that he has put her in the care of some of his own friends. I went to him and demanded that he tell me where she was, but I might just as well have tried to extract information from a stone as from that astute disciple of the law—blast him! He finally intimated that my room would be better than my company, and that I might hear from him later on."

"Ah! he has doubtless taken her case in hand—she has chosen him as her attorney," said Mr. Goddard.

"It looks like it," snapped the young man; "but he will not find it an easy matter to free her from me; the marriage was too public and too shrewdly managed to be successfully contested."

"It was the most shameful and dastardly piece of villainy that I ever heard of," exclaimed Gerald Goddard, indignantly, "and—"

"And you evidently intend to take the girl's part against me," sneered his companion, his anger blazing forth hotly. "If I remember rightly, you rather admired her yourself."

"I certainly did; she was one of the purest and sweetest girls I ever met," was the dignified reply. "Emil, you have not a ghost of a chance of supporting your claim if the matter comes to trial, and I beg that you will quietly relinquish it without litigation," he concluded, appealingly.

"Not if I know myself," was the defiant retort.

"But that farce was no marriage."

"All the requirements of the law were fulfilled, and I fancy that any one who attempts to prove to the contrary will find himself in deeper water than will be comfortable, in spite of your assertion that I 'have not a ghost of a chance.'"

"Possibly, but I doubt it. All the same, I warn you, here and now, Correlli, that I shall use what influence I have toward freeing that beautiful girl from your power," Mr. Goddard affirmed, with an air of determination not to be mistaken.

"Do you mean it—you will publicly appear against me if the matter goes into court?"

"I do."

The young man appeared to be in a white rage for a moment; then, snapping his fingers defiantly in his companion's face, he cried:

"Do your worst! I do not fear you; you can prove nothing."

"No, I have no absolute proof, but I can at least give the court the benefit of my suspicions and opinion."

"What! and compromise your dead wife before a scandal-loving public?"

"Emil, if Anna could speak at this moment, I believe she would tell the truth herself, and save that innocent and lovely child from a fate which to her must seem worse than death," Mr. Goddard solemnly asserted.

"Thank you—you are, to say the least, not very flattering to me in your comparisons," angrily retorted Monsieur Correlli, as he sprang from his chair and moved toward the door.

He stopped as he laid his hand upon the silver knob and turned a white, vindictive face upon the other.

"Well, then," he said, between his white, set teeth, "since you have determined to take this stand against me, it will not be agreeable for us to meet as heretofore, and I feel compelled to ask you to vacate these premises at your earliest convenience."

"Very well! I shall, of course, immediately comply with your request. A few hours will suffice me to make the move you suggest," frigidly responded Gerald Goddard; but he had grown ghastly white with wounded pride and anger at being thus ignominiously turned out of the house where for so many years he had reigned supreme.

Emil Correlli bowed as he concluded, and left the room without a word in reply.

As the door closed after him Mr. Goddard sank back in his chair with a heavy sigh, as he realized fully, for the first time, how entirely alone in the world he was, and what a desolate future lay before him, shorn, as he was, of home and friends and all the wealth which for so long had paved a shining way for him through the world.

His head sank heavily upon his breast, and he sat thus for several minutes

absorbed in painful reflections.

He was finally aroused by the shutting of the street door, when, looking up, he saw the new master of the house pass the window, and he knew that henceforth he would be his bitter enemy.

He glanced wistfully around the beautiful room—the dearest in the house to him; at the elegant cases of valuable books, every one of which he himself had chosen and caused to be uniformly bound; at the choice paintings in their costly frames upon the walls, and many of which had been painted by his own hands; at the numerous pieces of statuary and rare curios which he knew would never assume their familiar aspect in any other place.

How could he ever make up his mind to dismantle that home-like spot and bury his treasures in a close and gloomy storage warehouse?

"Homeless, penniless, and alone?" he murmured, crushing back into his breast a sob that arose to his throat.

Then suddenly his glance fell upon the table beside him and rested upon the letter that Mr. Clayton had given to him, and which, in the exciting occurrences of the last hour, he had entirely forgotten.

He took it up and sighed heavily again as the faint odor of Anna's favorite perfume was wafted to his nostrils.

"How changed is everything since she wrote this!—what a complete revolution in one's life a few hours can make!" he mused.

He broke the seal with some curiosity, but with something of awe as well, for it seemed to him almost like a message from the other world, and drew forth two sheets of closely-written paper.

The missive was not addressed to any one; the writer had simply begun what she had to say and told her story through to the end, and then signed her name in full in a clear, bold hand.

The man had not read half the first page before his manner betrayed that its contents were of the most vital importance.

On and on he read, his face expressing various emotions until by the time he reached the end there was an eagerness in his manner, a gleam of animation in



his eyes which told that the communication had been of a nature to entirely change the current of his thoughts and distract them from everything of an unpleasant character regarding himself.

He folded and returned the letter to its envelope with trembling hands.

"Oh, Anna! Anna!" he murmured, "why could you not have been always governed by your better impulses, instead of yielding so weakly to the evil in your nature? This makes my way plain at least—now I am ready to bid farewell to this home and all that is behind me, and try to fathom what the future holds for me."

He carefully put the letter away into an inner pocket, then sat down to his desk and began to look over his private papers.

When that task was completed he ordered the butler to have some boxes and packing cases, that were stored in the cellar, brought up to the library, when he carefully packed away such books, pictures and other things as he wished to take away with him.

It was not an easy task, and he could almost as readily have committed them to the flames as to have despoiled that beautiful home of what, for so long, had made it so dear and attractive to him.

When his work was completed he went out, slipped over into Boylston street, where he knew there were plenty of rooms to be rented, and where he soon engaged a *suite* that would answer his purpose for the present.

This done, he secured a man and team to move his possessions, and before the shades of night had fallen he had stored everything he owned away in his new quarters and bidden farewell forever to the aristocratic dwelling on Commonwealth avenue, where he had lived so luxuriously and entertained so elaborately the *crème de la crème* of Boston society.

Three days later he had disappeared from the city—"gone abroad" the papers said, "for a change of scene and to recuperate from the effects of the shock caused by his wife's sudden death."



## **CHAPTER XXXIII.**

## **MR. BRYANT MEETS WITH UNEXPECTED DIFFICULTIES.**

Let us now return to Edith, to ascertain how she is faring under the care of her new friends in New York.

On the morning following her arrival Mr. Bryant called at the house of his cousin, Mrs. Morrell, as he had promised, to escort our fair heroine to his office, to meet Mr. Louis Raymond, who had been so anxiously searching for her.

The gentleman had not arrived when they reached the place that was so familiar to Edith, and "Roy," as she was slyly beginning to call him, conducted her directly to his own special sanctum, and seated her in the most comfortable chair, to await the coming of the stranger.

"My sunshine has come back to me," he smilingly remarked, as he bent over her and touched his lips to her forehead in a fond caress. "I have not had one bright day since that morning when I returned from my trip and found your letter, telling me that you were not coming to me any more."

"I did not think, then, that I should ever return," Edith began, gravely. Then she added, in a lighter tone: "But now, that I am here, will you not set me at work?"

"Indeed, no; there shall be no more toiling for you, my darling," returned the young man, with almost passionate tenderness.

Edith shrank a little at his fond words, and a troubled expression leaped into her eyes.

Somehow she could not feel that she had a right to accept his loving attentions and terms of endearment, precious as they were to her, while there was any possibility that another had a claim upon her.

Roy saw the movement, hardly noticeable though it was, and understood the feeling that had prompted it, and he resolved that he would be patient, and refrain from causing her even the slightest annoyance until he could prove to her that she was free.

A few moments later Mr. Raymond was ushered in, and Roy, after greeting him

cordially, presented him to Edith.

It was evident from the earnestness with which he studied her face that the man had more than an ordinary interest in her; while, as he clasped her hand, he appeared to be almost overcome with emotion.

"Pardon me," he said, as he struggled for self-control, "but this meeting with you awakens memories that have proved too much for my composure. You do not resemble your mother, Miss Edith," he concluded, in a tone of regret, as he gazed wistfully into her eyes.

"No?" the fair girl returned, flushing, and feeling half guilty for allowing him to believe that she was Mr. and Mrs. Allandale's own child.

But she had determined to let him tell his story, or at least reveal the nature of his business with her, and then be governed by circumstances regarding her own disclosures.

"If you will kindly excuse me, I will look over my mail while you are conversing with Miss Allandale," Roy remarked, thinking, with true delicacy, that the man might have some communication to make which he would not care to have a third party overhear.

Then, with a bow and a smile, he passed from the room, leaving the two alone.

"I cannot tell you how gratified I am to find you, Miss Edith," Mr. Raymond remarked, as the door closed. "I have met only disappointment of late, and, indeed, throughout most of my life, and I feared that our advertisements might not meet your eye. I was deeply pained upon returning to America, after many years spent abroad, to learn of the misfortunes of your family, while the knowledge of your mother's privations during the last two years of her life—as related to me by Mr. Bryant—has caused me more grief than I can express."

"Yes, mamma's last days were very, very sad," said Edith, while tears dimmed her eyes.

"Tell me about them, please—tell me all about your father's death, and how it happened that you became so reduced financially," said Mr. Raymond.

Then the fair girl, beginning with the loss of her young brothers, related all that had occurred during the two years following, up to the time of her mother's death, while she spoke most touchingly of the patience and fortitude with which

the gentle invalid had borne their struggles with poverty and hardship.

More than once her companion was forced to wipe the tears from his cheeks, as he listened to the sad recital, while his eyes lingered affectionately upon the faithful girl who—as he learned from Mr. Bryant—had so heroically tried to provide for the necessities of one whom, it was evident, he had loved with more than ordinary affection.

When she had concluded her story he remained silent for a few moments, as if to fortify himself for the revelations which he had to make; then he remarked:

"Your mother and I, Miss Edith, were 'neighbors and playmates' during our childhood—'schoolmates and friends' for long years afterward, she would have told you; but—ever since I can remember, she was the dearest object the world held for me. This affection grew with my growth until, when I was twenty-one years of age, I asked her to marry me. Her answer was like obscuring the sun at midday, for she told me that she loved another; she had met Albert Allendale, and he had won, apparently without an effort, what I had courted for many years. I could not blame her, for I was but too conscious that he was my superior, both physically and mentally, while the position he offered her was far above anything I could hope to give her—at least, for a long time. But it was a terrible blow to me, and I immediately left the country, feeling that I could never remain here to witness the happiness that had been denied me. During my exile I heard from them occasionally, through others, and of the ideal life they were leading; but I never once thought of returning to this country until about six months ago, when, my health suddenly failing, I felt that I would at least like to die upon my native soil. You can, perhaps, imagine the shock I experienced, upon arriving in New York, when I learned of Mr. Allendale's misfortunes and death, and also that his wife and only surviving child had been left destitute and were hiding themselves and their poverty in some remote corner, unknown to their former friends. I searched the city for you, and then, discouraged with my lack of success, I put my case into the hands of Mr. Bryant, from whom I learned of the death of your mother and your brave struggles with want and hardships; whereupon I commissioned him to spare no effort or expense to find you; hence the advertisement which, his note to me last evening told me, met your eye in a Boston paper, and brought you hither."

"What a strange, romantic story!" Edith murmured, as Mr. Raymond paused at this point; "and, although it is so very sad, it makes you seem almost like an old friend to know that you once knew and loved mamma."

"Thank you, dear child," returned the man, eagerly, a smile hovering for a moment around his thin lips. "I hardly expected you to greet me thus, but it nevertheless sounds very pleasant to my unaccustomed ears. And now, having told you my story in brief, my wish is to settle upon you, for your dear mother's sake, as well as for your own, a sum that will place you above the necessity of ever laboring for your support in the future. During the last ten years I have greatly prospered in business—indeed, I have accumulated quite a handsome fortune—while, strange to say, I have not a relative in the world to inherit it. The disease which has attacked me warns me that I have not long to live; therefore I wish to arrange everything before my mind and strength fail me. One-half of my property I desire to leave to a certain charitable institution in this city; the remainder is to be yours, my child, and may the blessing of an old and world-weary man go with it."

As he concluded, Edith raised her tearful eyes to find him regarding her with a look of tender earnestness that was very pathetic.

"You are very, very kind, Mr. Raymond," she responded, in tremulous tones, "and I should have been inexpressibly happy if mamma could have been benefited by your generosity; but—I feel that I have no right to receive this bequest from you."

"And why not, pray?" exclaimed her companion, in surprise, a look of keen disappointment sweeping over his face.

"Because—truth compels me to tell you that I am the child of Mr. and Mrs. Allandale only by adoption," said Edith, with quivering lips, for it always pained her to think of her relationship to those whom she had so loved, in this light.

"Can that be possible?" cried Mr. Raymond, in astonishment.

"Yes, sir; it hurts me to speak of it—to even think of it; but it is true," she replied.

Then she proceeded to relate the circumstances of her adoption, as far as she could do so without casting any reflections upon the unhappy young mother who had been so wronged in Rome.

"Of course, I loved papa and mamma just the same as if they had really been my own parents," she remarked, in conclusion, "for I had not a suspicion of the truth until after mamma died. I was always treated exactly as if I had been as near to

them as the children who died."

"And have you no knowledge of your own parents?" Mr. Raymond inquired.

"Not the slightest. The only clues I possess are some letters in my mother's handwriting and the name Belle that she signed to him. Strange as it may seem, there is not a surname nor any reference made to the locality where she lived in her youth, to aid me in my search for her relatives."

"That seems very singular," said the gentleman, musingly.

"It is not only that, but it is also very trying," Edith returned. "Of course, my mother is dead; my father"—this with a proud uplifting of her pretty head—"I have no desire even to look upon his face. I could never own the relationship, even should we meet; but I would like to know something about my mother's family, for, as far as I know, I have—like yourself—not a relative in the world."

"Then pray, Miss Edith, for the sake of that other Edith whom I loved, regard me, while I live, as your stanch, true friend," said Mr. Raymond, earnestly. "The fact that you were the child of Edith Allandale only by adoption will make no difference in my plans for you. To all intents and purposes you were her daughter—she loved you as such—you were faithful and tender toward her until the end; therefore I shall settle the half of my property upon you for your immediate use. I beg that you will feel no delicacy in accepting this provision for your future," he interposed, appealingly, as he remarked her heightened color. "Mr. Bryant had full instructions to carry out my wishes, and the money would have been yours unconditionally, had I never been so happy as to meet you. The only favor I ask of you in return is the privilege of seeing you occasionally, to talk with you of your mother."

The tears rolled thick and fast over the young girl's face at this appeal, for she was deeply touched by the man's tender regard for her interests, and by his yearning to be in sympathy with one who had known so intimately the one love of his life.

"You are very kind," she said, when she could command her voice sufficiently to speak. "I have no words adequate to thank you, and it will be only a delight to me to tell you anything you may wish to know about her who was so dear to us both. I could never tire of talking of mamma. More than this, I trust you will allow me to be of some comfort to you," she added, earnestly. "When you are lonely or ill I shall be glad to minister to you in any way that I may be able."

"It is very thoughtful of you, Miss Edith, to suggest anything of the kind," Louis Raymond responded, his wan face lighting with pleasure at her words, "and no doubt I shall be glad to avail myself now and then of your kindness; but we will talk of that at another time."

He arose as he concluded, and, opening the door leading into the outer office, requested Mr. Bryant to join them, when the conversation became general.

Later that same day, at Mr. Raymond's desire, the papers were drawn up that made Edith the mistress of a snug little fortune in her own right, the income from which would insure her every comfort during the remainder of her life.

The man was unwilling that the matter should be delayed, lest something should interfere to balk his plans.

When Roy took Edith back to Mrs. Morrell's he expressed his admiration and sympathy in the highest terms for the generous-hearted invalid.

"When we make a home for ourselves, darling, let us invite him to share it, and we will try to make his last days his happiest days. What do you say to the plan, sweet?" he queried, as he bent to look into the beautiful face beside him.

Edith flushed painfully at his question and hesitated to reply.

"What is it, love?" he urged, forgetting for the moment the resolve he had made earlier in the day.

"Of course, Roy, I would be glad to do anything in the world for one who was so devoted to mamma, and who, for her sake, has been so considerate for my future; but—"

"Well, what is this dreadful 'but'?" was the smiling query.

"I am afraid that you are too sanguine regarding our prospects," returned the fair girl, gravely. "I am somehow impressed that we shall meet with difficulties that you do not anticipate in the way of your happiness."

"Do not be faint-hearted, dear," said her lover, tenderly, although a shade of anxiety swept over his face as he spoke. "I am going immediately to look up that woman with whom Giulia Fiorini told you she boarded, and ascertain what evidence she can give me to sustain my theory regarding Correlli's relations with the girl."



He left Edith at Mrs. Morrell's door, and then hastened away upon his errand.

He easily found the street and number which Edith had given him, and, to his joy, the name of the woman he sought was on the door.

A portly matron, richly dressed, but with a very shrewd face, answered his ring, and greeted him with suave politeness.

"Yes, she remembered Giulia Fiorini," she remarked, in answer to his inquiry. "She was a pretty Italian girl who had run away from her own country, wasn't she? Would the gentleman kindly walk in? and she would willingly respond to any further questions he might wish to ask."

Roy followed her into a handsomely-furnished parlor, that was separated from another by elegant portieres, which, however, were closely drawn, thus concealing the room beyond.

"Yes," madam continued, "the girl had a child—a boy—a fine little fellow, whom she called Ino, and she did remember that a gentleman visited them occasionally—the girl's brother, cousin, or some other relation, she believed"—with a look of perplexity that would lead one to infer that such visits had been so rare she found it difficult to place the gentleman at all.

"No, she did not even know his name, and she had never heard him admit that the girl was his wife—certainly not!—nor the child call him father or papa. There had always been something mysterious about Giulia, but she had appeared to have plenty of money, and had paid her well, and thus she had not concerned herself about her private affairs."

Roy's heart grew cold and heavy within him as he listened to these suave and evasive replies to his every question.

It was evident to him that she had already received instructions what to say in the event of such a visit, and was paid liberally to carry them out.

He spent nearly an hour with her trying to make her contradict or commit herself in some way, but she never once made a mistake; her answers were very pat and to the point, and he knew no more when he arose to leave than he had known when he entered the house.

He was very heavy-hearted—indeed, a feeling of despair began to settle down upon him; for, unless he could prove that Emil Correlli had taken Giulia Fiorini

to that house, and lived with her there as her husband, he felt that he had very little to hope for regarding his future with Edith.

Madam ushered him out as courteously as she had invited him in, regretting exceedingly that she could not give him all the information he desired, and hoped that the matter was not so important as to cause him any especial annoyance.

She even inquired if he knew where Giulia was at that time, remarking that she "had been invariably sweet-tempered and lady-like, and she should always feel an interest in her, in spite of a certain air of mystery that seemed to envelop her."

But the moment the door closed after her visitor madam's keen, black eyes began to glitter and a shrewd smile played about her cunning mouth.

A little gurgling laugh of triumph broke from her red lips as she returned to the parlor, when the portieres between it and the room were swept aside, and Emil Correlli himself walked into her presence.



## **CHAPTER XXXIV.**

## AN UNEXPECTED MEETING RESULTS IN A WONDERFUL DISCOVERY.

"Well done, madam! you managed to pull the wool over his eyes in very good shape," the man remarked, a look of evil triumph sweeping over his face.

"Certainly, Mr. Correlli," the woman returned, in a tone of serene satisfaction. "Only give me my price, and I am ready to make anybody believe that black is white, every time; and now I'll take that five hundred, if you please," she concluded, as she extended her fat hand for the plump fee for which she had been so zealously working.

"You shall have it—you shall have it; I will write you a check for it immediately," said Monsieur Correlli. "But—you are sure there is no one in the house who knows anything about the facts of the case?" he added, inquiringly, after a moment of thought.

"Yes, I am sure; I haven't a single servant now that was with me when the girl was here."

"Have you any idea where they went after leaving you?" asked the man, with evident uneasiness.

"Lor', no; you needn't have the slightest fear of their turning up," responded his companion, with a light laugh. "That lawyer might as well try to hunt for a needle in a hay-mow as to seek them as witnesses against you; while, as for the lodgers who were here at the time, not one of them knew anything about your affairs. By the way," she added, curiously, "what has become of the girl?"

"She followed me to Boston, and is there now, doubtless."

"Would she be likely to know anything about the laws of New York regarding marriage?"

"No, indeed; she is a perfect ignoramus as far as any knowledge of the customs of this country is concerned."

"That is lucky for you; but, if you know where she can be found, I would advise you to send her back to Italy with all possible dispatch. She is liable to make

trouble for you if she learns the truth, for"—madam here shot a sly look at her companion—"a man can't live a year or two with a woman here in New York, allowing her to believe herself his wife, and her child to call him 'papa'—paying all her bills, without giving her a pretty strong claim upon him. However, mum's the word with me, provided I get my pay for it," she concluded, with a knowing wink.

Emil Correlli frowned at her coarse familiarity and the indirect threat implied in her last words; but, simply remarking that he "would draw that check," he returned to the room whence he had come, while his companion turned to a window, chuckling softly to herself.

Presently he reappeared and slipped into her hand a check for five hundred dollars.

"Now, in case this matter should come to court, I shall rely upon you to swear that the girl's story is false and the lawyer's charge simply a romance of his imagination," he remarked.

"You may depend on me, sir—I will not fail you," madam responded, as, with a complacent look, she neatly folded the check and deposited it in her purse.

Emil Correlli had arrived in New York very early the same morning, and, not caring to have his presence there known, he had sought a room in the house of the woman with whom Giulia had boarded for nearly two years.

Having partaken of a light breakfast, he went out again to seek the policeman to whom he had telegraphed to detain Edith.

He readily found him, when he learned all that we already know of the man's efforts to obey Correlli's orders.

"That was the girl, in spite of the lawyer's interference. You should have never let her go," he angrily exclaimed, when the officer had described Edith and told his story.

"But I couldn't, sir—I had no authority—no warrant—and I should have got myself into trouble," the man objected, adding: "The lawyer was a shrewd one and had a high and mighty way with him that made a fellow go into his boots and fight shy of him."

Monsieur Correlli knew that the man was right, and saw that he must make the

best of the situation; so, taking possession of Roy's card, and making his way directly to Broadway, he prowled about the vicinity of his office to see what he could discover.

He had not waited very long when his heart bounded as he caught sight of Edith coming down the street and escorted by a handsome, manly fellow, whose beaming face and adoring eyes plainly betrayed his secret to the jealous watcher, who gnashed his teeth in fury at the sight.

The happy, unconscious couple soon disappeared within an office building, whereupon Correlli went back to his lodgings to lay his plans for future operations.

Some hours later, while he was conversing with his landlady in her pretty parlor, he was startled to see Edith's champion of the morning mounting the steps of the house.

Like a flash he seemed to comprehend the object of his visit there; but he was puzzled to understand how it was possible for either Edith or him to know that he or Giulia had ever lived there.

A few rapid words were sufficient to reveal the situation to his landlady, to whom he promised a liberal reward if she would implicitly follow his directions.

The result we know; and, although his bribe had been a heavy one, he did not begrudge the money, since he believed he had thus securely fortified himself against all attacks from the enemy.

Later in the day he attempted to dog the young lawyer's steps, hoping thus to ferret out Edith's hiding place; but nothing satisfactory resulted, for Roy, after his hard and somewhat disappointing day, simply repaired to his club, where, after partaking of his dinner and smoking a cigar to soothe his nerves, he retired to rest.

But the next morning, feeling secure of his position, Emil Correlli boldly presented himself in his rival's office and demanded of him Edith's address.

Roy was prepared for him, for his fruitless visit to Giulia's former landlady had aroused his suspicions that Monsieur Correlli was in the city.

Therefore he had resolved neither to evade nor parley with him, but boldly defy the man, by acknowledging himself the wronged girl's champion and legal

adviser.

"I cannot give you Miss Allandale's address," he quietly responded to his visitor's demand.

"Do you mean to imply that you do not know it?" he questioned, arrogantly.

"Not at all, sir; the lady is under my protection, as my client; therefore, in her interest I refuse to reveal her place of residence," Roy coolly responded.

"But she is my wife, and I have a right to know where she is," said the would-be husband, his anger flaming up hotly at being thus balked in his desires.

"Your wife?" repeated the young lawyer, in an incredulous tone, but growing white about the mouth from the effort he made to retain command of himself, as the obnoxious term fell from the villain's lips.

"Certainly—I claim her as such; my right to do so cannot be questioned."

"There may be a difference of opinion regarding that matter," Roy calmly rejoined.

"But we were publicly married on the twenty-fifth."

"Ah! but there are circumstances under which even such a ceremony can have no legal significance."

The fiery Italian was no match for the lawyer in that cool, calm mood, and his anger increased as he realized it.

"But I have my certificate, and can produce plenty of witnesses to prove my statements," he retorted.

"The court will decide whether your evidence is sufficient to substantiate your claim," Mr. Bryant composedly remarked.

"The court?—will she take the matter into court?—will she dare create such a scandal?" exclaimed the man, in a startled tone.

"I do not feel at liberty, even had I the inclination, to reveal any points in my client's case," coldly replied the young lawyer. "This much I will say, however," he added, sternly, "I shall leave nothing undone to free her from a tie that is both hateful and fraudulent."

"I warn you that you will have a battle to fight that will cost you something," snarled the baffled villain.

"That also remains to be seen, sir; but whether you or I win this battle, let me tell you, once for all, that Miss Allandale will never submit to any authority which you may imagine you have acquired over her by tricking her into this so-called marriage; she will never live one hour with you; she will never respond to your name."

Royal Bryant arose as he concluded this defiant speech, thus intimating to his visitor that he wished to put an end to the interview, for the curb that he was putting upon himself was becoming almost unbearable.

Emil Correlli gazed searchingly into his face for a moment, as if trying to measure his foe.

He could not fail to realize the superiority of the man, mentally, morally and physically, and the thought was maddening that perhaps Edith had freely given to him the love for which he had abjectly sued in vain.

"Well," he finally remarked, as he also arose, while he revealed his white teeth in a vicious smile, "it may be in her power to carry out that resolution, but one thing is sure, she can never free herself from the fetters which she finds so galling—she can never marry any other man while I live."

This shot told, for the blue veins in Roy's temples suddenly swelled out full at the malignant retort.

But he mastered his first impulse to seize the wretch and throw him from the window into the street, and quietly remarked:

"As I have twice before observed, sir, all these things remain to be seen and proved. Now, can I do anything further for you to-day?"

The man could not do otherwise than take the hint; besides, there was that in Roy's eye which warned him that it would not be safe for him to try him too far. So, abruptly turning upon his heel, he left the room, while our young lawyer, with tightly compressed lips and care-lined brow, walked the floor in troubled thought.

After leaving his office Emil Correlli repaired to the hotel where his letters were usually sent, and found awaiting him there a telegram announcing the sudden



death of his sister and requesting his immediate return to Boston.

Shocked beyond measure, and grieved to the soul by this unexpected bereavement, he dropped everything and left New York on the next eastward express.

We know all that occurred in that home where death had come so unexpectedly; how, after the burial of Mrs. Goddard, Emil Correlli had suddenly found his already large fortune greatly augmented by the strange will of his sister, while the man whom she had always professed to adore was left destitute, and to shift for himself as best he could.

The day after he had turned Gerald Goddard out of his home, so to speak, the young man dismissed all his servants, closed the house, and put it into the hands of a real estate agent to be disposed of at the best advantage.

He made an effort to find Giulia and her child, with the intention of settling a comfortable income upon them, provided he could make the girl promise to return to Italy and never trouble him again.

But she had disappeared, and he could learn absolutely nothing regarding her movements; and, impressed with a feeling that she would yet revenge herself upon him in some unexpected way, he finally returned to New York, determined to ferret out Edith's hiding place.

Meantime the fair girl had been very happy with her new friends, who were also growing very fond of her.

But she would not allow herself to build too much upon the hope of attaining her freedom which Roy had tried to arouse in her heart shortly after her arrival in New York.

Indeed, she had begun to notice that, after the first day or two, he had avoided conversing upon the subject, while he often wore a look of anxiety and care which betrayed that he was deeply troubled about something.

In fact, Roy was very heavy-hearted, for, since his failure to learn anything from Giulia's former landlady to prove his theory correct, he had begun to fear that it would be a very difficult matter to free the girl he loved from the chain that bound her to Correlli.

If he could have found the discarded girl herself he believed that, with her

assistance, he would soon discover the servants who had been in the house during her residence there, and, through them, find some substantial evidence to work upon.

But although he had advertised for her in several Boston papers, he had not been able to get any trace of her.

He had, however, filed a plea to have Edith's so-called marriage set aside, and was anxiously waiting for some time to be appointed for a hearing of the' case.

Edith and her new acquaintance, Mr. Raymond, were fast becoming firm friends, in spite of the suspense that was hanging over the former regarding her future.

The young girl had first been drawn toward the invalid from a feeling of sympathy, and because of his old-time fondness for her mother. But, upon becoming better acquainted with him, she began to admire him for his many noble qualities, both of mind and heart, while she ever found him a most entertaining companion, as he possessed an exhaustless fund of anecdote and personal experiences, acquired during his extensive travels, which he never wearied of relating when he could find an appreciative listener.

Thus she spent a great deal of time with him, while by her many little attentions to his comfort she won a large place in his heart.

One day Mrs. Morrell and Edith went to attend a charity exhibition that was under the supervision of a friend of the former, at her own house.

Upon their arrival they were ushered into the drawing-room, which was beautifully decorated and hung with many exquisite paintings, while some rare gems were resting conspicuously upon easels.

In one corner, and artistically draped with a beautiful scarf, Edith was startled, almost at the moment of her entrance, to see a painting that was very familiar.

It was that representing a portion of an old Roman wall, with the lovers resting in its shadow, which had attracted the attention of Mrs. Stewart on the last night of the "winter frolic," at Wyoming.

With an expression of astonishment she went forward to examine it more closely and to assure herself that it was the original, and not a copy.

Yes, those two tiny letters, G. G., in one corner, told their own story, and proved

her surmise to be correct.

"How strange that it should be here!" she breathed.

She had hardly uttered the words when some one arose from behind the easel, and—she stood face to face with Gerald Goddard himself.

The girl stood white and almost paralyzed before him, and the man appeared scarcely less astonished on beholding her.

"Miss Allen!" he faltered. "I never dreamed of meeting you here!"

"Oh, pray do not tell Monsieur Correlli that you have seen me," she gasped, fear for the moment superseding every other thought.

"Do not be troubled—he shall learn nothing from me," said the man, reassuringly. "Correlli and I are not very good friends just now, simply because I told him that I should do all in my power to help you prove that he had no just claim upon you."

"Thank you," said Edith, flushing with hope, but involuntarily shrinking from him, for she could not forget how he had degraded himself before her on that last horrible night at Wyoming.

"I suppose you have heard of my—of Mrs. Goddard's death?" he remarked, after a moment of silence.

"Mrs. Goddard—dead?" exclaimed Edith, shocked beyond expression.

"Yes, she died very suddenly, the second morning after you left Boston."

Edith was about to respond with some expression of regret and sympathy, when she saw him start violently, and a look of agony, that bordered on despair, leap into his eyes.

Involuntarily she turned to see what had caused it, and was both surprised and delighted to behold Mrs. Stewart—whom she supposed to be in Boston—just entering the room, and looking especially lovely in a rich black velvet costume, with a hat to match, but brightened by two or three exquisite pink roses.

At that instant a lady, to whom she had recently been introduced, laid her hand upon Edith's arm, remarking in quick, incisive tones:

"Miss Allandale, your friend, Mrs. Morrell, is beckoning you to come to her."

Again Gerald Goddard started, and so violently that he nearly knocked his picture from the easel.

He shot one quick, horrified glance at the girl.

"Miss Allandale!" he repeated, in a dazed tone, as all that the name implied forced itself upon his mind.

Another in the room had also caught the name, and turned to see who had been thus addressed.

As her glance fell upon Edith her beautiful face grew radiant.

"Oh, if it should be—" she breathed.

The next moment she had crossed the room to the girl's side.

"What did Mrs. Baldwin call you, dear?" she breathlessly inquired, regardless of etiquette, for she had not yet greeted her hostess. "Was it Miss Allandale?"

"Yes, that is my name," said Edith, flushing, but frankly meeting her look of eager inquiry.

"But you told me—" Mrs. Stewart whispered.

"Yes," interposed the young girl, "while I was in Boston I was known simply as Edith Allen—why, I will explain to you at some other time; but my real name is Edith Allandale."

The woman seemed turned to stone for a moment by this unexpected revelation, so statue-like did she become, as she also realized all that this confession embodied.

Then, as if compelled by some magnetic influence, her eyes were drawn toward the no less statue-like man standing by that never-to-be forgotten picture on the easel.

Their gaze met, and each read in that one brief look the conviction that made one heart bound with joy, the other to sink with despair—each knew that the beautiful girl, standing so wonderingly beside that stately woman, was the child that had been born to them in the pretty Italian villa hard by the old Roman wall which Gerald Goddard had so faithfully reproduced upon canvas.



## **CHAPTER XXXV.**

## "THAT MAN MY FATHER!"

Isabel Stewart was the first to recover herself, when, gently linking her arm within Edith's, she whispered, softly:

"Come with me, dear; I would like to see you alone for a few minutes."

She led her unresistingly from the room, across the hall, to a small reception-room, when, closing the door to keep out intruders, she turned and laid both her trembling hands upon the girl's shoulders.

"Tell me," she said, looking wistfully into her wondering eyes, "are you the daughter of Albert and Edith Allandale?"

"Yes."

It was all the answer that Edith, in her excitement, could make.

The beautiful woman caught her breath graspingly, and every particle of color faded from her face.

"Tell me, also," she went on, hurriedly, "did you ever hear your—your mother speak of a friend by the name of Belle Haven?"

Edith's heart leaped into her throat at this question, and she, too, began to tremble, as a suspicion of the truth flashed through her mind.

"No," she said, with quivering lips, "I never heard her mention such a person; but—"

"Yes—'but'—" eagerly repeated her companion.

"But," the fair girl continued, gravely, while she searched with a look of pain the eyes looking so eagerly into hers, "the evening after mamma was buried, I found some letters which had been written to her from Rome, and which were all signed 'Belle.'"

"Oh!—"

It was a sharp cry of agony that burst from Isabel Stewart's lips.

"Oh, why did she keep them?" she went on, wildly; "how could she have been so unwise? Why—why did she not destroy them?"

At these words a light so eager, so beautiful, so tender that it seemed to transfigure her, suddenly illumined Edith's face, for they confirmed, beyond a doubt, the suspicion and hope that had been creeping into her heart.

"Tell me—are you that 'Belle'?" she whispered, bending nearer to her with gleaming eyes.

"Oh, do not ask me!" cried the unhappy woman, a bitter sob escaping her.

She had never dreamed of anything so dreadful as that those fatal letters would fall into the hands of her child, to prejudice her and make her shrink from her with aversion.

She had planned, if she was ever so fortunate as to find her, and had to reveal her history to her, to smooth over all that would be likely to shock her—that she would never confess to her how despair had driven her to the verge of that one crime upon which she now looked back with unspeakable horror.

The thought that this beautiful girl knew all, and believed the worst—as she could not fail to do, she reasoned, after reading the crude facts mentioned in those letters—filled her with shame and grief: for how could she ever eradicate those first impressions, and win the love she so craved?

Thus she was wholly unprepared for what followed immediately upon her indirect acknowledgment of her identity.

The gentle girl, her expressive face radiant with mingled joy, love, sympathy, slipped both arms around her companion's waist, and dropping her head upon her shoulder, murmured, fondly:

"Ah, I am sure you are!—I am sure that I have found my mother, and—I am almost too happy to live."

"Child! my own darling! Is it possible that you can thus open your heart of hearts to me?" sobbed the astonished woman, as she clasped the slight form to her in a convulsive embrace.

"Oh, yes—yes; I have longed for you, with longing unspeakable, ever since I knew," Edith murmured, tremulously.



"Longed for me? Ah, I never dared to hope that Heaven could be so kind. I feared, love, that you would despise me, as a weak and willful woman, even after I should tell you all my story, with its extenuating circumstances; but now, while knowing and believing only the worst, you take me into the arms of your love, and own me—your mother!"

She broke down utterly at this point, and both, clasped in each other's embrace, sobbed in silent sympathy for a few moments.

"Well, dearest, this will never do," Mrs. Stewart at last exclaimed, as she lifted her face and smiled tenderly upon Edith; "we must at least compose ourselves long enough to make our adieus to our hostess; then I am going to take you home with me, to have all the story of our tangled past unraveled and explained. Come, let us sit down for a few moments, until we get rid of the traces of our tears, and you shall tell me how you happened to be in Boston under the name of Edith Allen."

She drew her toward a couch as she spoke, and there Edith related how she had happened to meet the Goddard's on the train, between New York and Boston, and was engaged to act as madam's companion, and how also the mistake regarding her name had occurred.

"And were you happy with them, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Stewart, regarding her curiously.

The fair girl flushed.

"Indeed I was not," she replied, "I think they were the strangest people I ever met."

Almost as she spoke the door of the reception-room opened, and Gerald Goddard himself appeared upon the threshold.

He was pale to ghastliness, and looked years older than when Edith had seen him in the drawing-room a few minutes previous.

"Pardon me this intrusion, Miss—Edith," he began, shrinkingly, while he searched both faces before him with despairing eyes; "but I am about to leave, and I wished to give you this note before I went. If, after reading it, you should care to communicate with me, you can address me at the Murry Hill Hotel."

He laid the missive upon a table near the door, then, with a bow, withdrew,

leaving the mother and daughter alone again.

"That was Mr. Goddard," Edith explained to her companion, as she arose to take the letter; but without a suspicion that the two had ever met before, or that the man was her own father—the "monster" who had so wronged her beautiful mother.

Mrs. Stewart made no reply to the remark; and Edith, breaking the seal of the envelope in her hands, drew forth several closely-written pages.

"Why!" she exclaimed, in a startled tone, "this is Mrs. Goddard's handwriting!"

She hastily unfolded the sheets and ran her eye rapidly down the first page, when a low cry broke from her lips, and, throwing herself upon her knees before her mother, she buried her face in her lap, murmuring joyfully:

"Saved! saved!"

"Darling, tell me!—what is this that excites you so?" Mrs. Stewart pleaded, as she bent over her and softly kissed her flushed cheek.

Edith put the letter into her hands, saying, eagerly:

"Read it—read it!—it will tell its own story."

Her companion obeyed her, and, as she read, her face grew stern and white—her eyes glittered with a fiery light which told of an outraged spirit aroused to a point where it would have been dangerous for the woman who once had deeply wronged her, had she been living, to have crossed her path again.

"If I had known!—if I had known—" she began, when she reached the end. Then, suddenly checking herself, she added, tenderly, to Edith: "My love, it seems so wonderful—all this that has happened to you and to me! We must take time to talk it all over by ourselves. You can excuse yourself to your friend, can you not, and come with me to the Waldorf? Say that I wish to keep you for the remainder of the day and night, but will return you to her in the morning."

Edith's face beamed with delight at this proposal.

"Yes, indeed," she said, rising to comply at once with the request. "I am sure Nellie will willingly give me up, when I whisper the truth in her ear. My dear—dear mother!" she added, tremulously, as she bent forward and kissed the beautiful face with quivering lips, "this wonderful revelation seems too joyful to

be true!"

"Edith, my child," gravely said Isabel Stewart, as she held the girl a little away from her and searched her face with anxious eyes, "after learning what you did of me, from those horrible letters, is there no shrinking in your heart—is there no feeling of—of shame or of pitiful contempt for me?"

"Not an atom, dear," whispered the trustful maiden, whose keen intuitions had long since fathomed the character of the woman before her; "to me you are as pure and dear as if that man—whoever he may have been—had never cast a shadow upon your life by the shameful deception which he practiced upon you."

"My blessed little comforter! you shall be rewarded for your faith in me," returned Mrs. Stewart, her lips wreathed in fondest smiles, her eyes glowing with happiness. "But go excuse yourself to Mrs. Morrell, then we will take leave of our hostess, and go home."

Ten minutes later they were on their way to the Waldorf.

It was rather a silent drive, for both were still too deeply moved over their recent reunion to care to enter into details just then. It was happiness enough to sit side by side, hand clasped in hand, knowing that they were mother and daughter, and in tenderest sympathy with each other.

Upon arriving at her hotel Mrs. Stewart led the way directly to her delightful suite of rooms, where, the moment the door was closed, she turned and once more gathered Edith into her arms.

"I must hold you—I must feel you, else I shall not be quite sure that I am not dreaming," she exclaimed. "I find it difficult to realize my great happiness. Can it be possible that I have my own again, after so many years! that you were once the tiny baby that I held in my arms in Rome, and loved better than any other earthly object? It is wonderful! wonderful! and strangest of all is the fact that your heart turns so fondly to me! Are you sure, dear, that you can unreservedly accept and love your mother, in spite of those letters, and what they revealed regarding my past life?"

And again she searched Edith's face and eyes as if she would read her inmost thoughts.

She met her glance clearly, unshrinkingly.

"I am sure that you never committed a willful wrong in your life," she gravely replied. "It was a sad mistake to go away from your home and parents, as you did; but there is no intent to sin to be laid to your charge—your soul shines, like a beacon light, through these dear eyes, and I am sure it is as pure and lovely as your face is beautiful."

"May He who always judges with divine mercy bless you for your sweet charity and faith," murmured Isabel Stewart, in tremulous tones, as she passionately kissed the lips which had just voiced such a blessed assurance of trust and love.

"Now come," she went on, a moment later, while, with her own hands, she tenderly removed Edith's hat and wrap, "we will make ourselves comfortable, then I will tell you all the sad story of my misguided youth."

Twining her arms about the girl's waist, she led her to a seat, and sitting beside her, she circumstantially related all that we already know of her history.

But not once did she mention the name of the man who had so deeply wronged her; for she had resolved, if it were possible, to keep from Edith the fact that Gerald Goddard, under whose roof she had lived, was her father.

The young girl, however, was not satisfied, was not content to be thus kept in the dark; and, when her mother's story was ended, she inquired, with grave face and clouded eyes:

"Who was this man?—why have you so persistently retrained from identifying him? What was the name of that coward to whom—with shame I say it—I am indebted for my being?"

"My love, cannot you restrain your curiosity upon that point? Will you not let the dead past bury its dead, without erecting a tablet to its memory?" her companion pleaded, gently. "It can do you no possible good—it might cause you infinite pain to know."

"Is the man living?" Edith sternly demanded.

Mrs. Stewart flushed.

"Yes," she replied, after a moment of hesitation.

"Then I must know—you must tell me, so that I may shun him as I would shun a deadly serpent," the young girl exclaimed, with compressed lips and flashing

eyes.

Mrs. Stewart looked both pained and troubled.

"My love, I wish you would not press this point," she remarked, nervously.

"Edith turned and gazed searchingly into her eyes.

"Do you still cherish an atom of affection for him?" she inquired.

"No! a thousand times no!" was the emphatic response, accompanied by a gesture of abhorrence.

"Then you can have no personal motive or sensitiveness concerning the matter."

"No, my child—my desire is simply to save you pain—to spare you a shock, perchance."

"Do I know him already?—have I ever seen him?" cried Edith, in a startled tone.

"Yes, dear."

"Then tell me! tell me!" panted the girl. "Oh! if I have spoken with him, it is a wonder that my tongue was not paralyzed in the act—that my very soul did not shrink and recoil with aversion from him!" she exclaimed, trembling from head to foot with excitement.

Her mother saw that it would be useless to attempt to keep the truth from her; that it would be better to tell her, or she might brood over the matter and make herself unhappy by vainly trying to solve the riddle in her own mind.

"Edith," she said, with gentle gravity, "the man is—Gerald Goddard!"

The girl sprang to her feet, electrified by the startling revelation, a low cry of dismay escaping her.

"He! that man my—father!" she breathed, hoarsely, with dilating nostrils and horrified eyes.

"It is true," was the sad response. "I would have saved you the pain of knowing this if I could."

"Oh! and I have lived day after day in his presence! I have talked and jested with him! I have eaten of his bread, and his roof has sheltered me!" cried Edith,

shivering with aversion. "Why, oh, why did not some instinct warn me of the wretched truth, and enable me to repudiate him and then fly from him as from some monster of evil? Ah, I was warned, if I had but heeded the signs," she continued, with flushed cheeks and flaming eyes. "There were many times when some word or look would make me shrink from him with a strange repugnance, and that last night in Wyoming—oh, he revealed his evil nature to me in a way that made me loathe him!"

"My child, pray calm yourself," pleaded her mother, regarding her with astonishment, for she never could have believed, but for this manifestation, that the usually gentle girl could have displayed so much spirit under any circumstances. "Come," she added, "sit down again, and explain what you meant by your reference to that last night at Wyoming."

And Edith, obeying her, related the conversation that had occurred between Mr. Goddard and herself, on the night of the ball, when the man had come to the dressing-room and asked her to button his gloves.



## **CHAPTER XXXVI.**

## FURTHER EXPLANATIONS BETWEEN MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

"It was very, very strange that you should have drifted into his home in such a way," Mrs. Stewart observed, when Edith's narrative was ended. "But, dear, I am not sorry—it was perhaps the best thing that could have happened, under the circumstances, for it afforded you an opportunity to gain an insight into the man's character without having been previously influenced or prejudiced by any one. If you had never met him, you might have imagined, after hearing my story, that I was more bitter and unforgiving toward him than he justly merited."

"He must have recognized you instantly when you entered Mrs. Wallace's drawing-room to-day," said Edith, musingly; "for, did you notice how strangely he looked when Mrs. Baldwin called me Miss Allandale, and you came to me so eagerly?"

"Yes; the relationship you bear to us both must have flashed upon him with as great a shock as upon me," Mrs. Stewart returned.

"And how perfectly wretched he appeared when he came to the reception-room door to give me the letter," Edith remarked, musingly, as that white, pained face arose before her mind's eye.

"Can you wonder, dear? How could he help being appalled when he remembered the treatment you had received while you were a member of his family?"

"It all seems very wonderful!" said the fair girl, thoughtfully, "and the fact of your being in the house at the same time, seems strangest of all!"

"It was a very bold thing to do, I admit," responded Mrs. Stewart; "but the case demanded some risk on my part—I was determined to get hold of that certificate, if it was in existence. I thought it better to employ strategy, rather than come into open controversy with them, as I wished to avoid all publicity if possible. I firmly believe that, if Anna Correlli had suspected that I was still alive, she would have destroyed the document rather than allow it to come into my possession."

"But you could have proved your marriage, through Mr. Forsyth, even if she



had," Edith interposed.

"Yes; but it would have caused a terrible scandal, for Mr. Goddard would have had to answer to the charge of bigamy; while the publicity I should have had to endure would have been exceedingly disagreeable to me. If, however, I had failed in my plans I should not have hesitated to adopt bold measures—for I was determined, for your sake as well as my own, to have proof that I was a legal wife and my child entitled to bear the name of her father, even though he might be unworthy of her respect."

"How did you happen to discover where the certificate was concealed?" Edith inquired.

"Do you remember, dear, the day when you came upon me, sitting faint and weary on the back stairs, and insisted that I should exchange work with you?" her companion questioned, with a fond smile.

"Yes, indeed, but I little thought that it was my own mother who was so worn out by performing such unaccustomed labor," the young girl responded, as she raised the hand she was holding and touched her lips softly to it.

"Neither of us had a suspicion of the tie between us," returned Mrs. Stewart; "and yet, from the moment that you entered the house, I experienced an unaccountable fondness for you."

"And I was immediately impressed that there was something very mysterious about you—our portly housekeeper," Edith smilingly replied.

"Did you?"

"Yes; for one thing, these hands"—regarding them fondly—"never looked as if they really belonged to portly Mrs. Weld, and, several times, you forgot to speak in your coarse, assumed tones; while, that evening, when I captured your hideous blue glasses, and looked into these lovely eyes, I was almost sure that you were not the woman you appeared to be."

"I remember," said her mother, "and I was conscious of your suspicions; but I did not mind, for my mission in that house was almost ended, and I intended, as soon as I could resume my real character, to renew my acquaintance with you, as Mrs. Stewart, and see if I could not persuade you to leave that uncongenial atmosphere and come to me."

"How strange!" murmured Edith.

"It was the motherly instinct reaching out after its own," was the tender response. "But, about my finding the certificate: You remember you offered to put the rooms in order, if I would sew for you meanwhile?"

"Yes."

"Well, that was the time that I learned where that precious paper could be found," and then she proceeded to relate the conversation that she had overheard between Mr. and Mrs. Goddard, and how, emboldened by it, she had afterward gone to the room of the latter to find her in the act of examining the very document she wanted.

She also told how, later, she had gone, by herself, to the room and deliberately taken possession of it.

She also mentioned the incident that had occurred on the same day in the dining-room, when Mr. Goddard had knocked her glasses off and seemed so disconcerted upon looking into her eyes.

"He appeared like one who had suddenly come face to face with some ghost of his past—as indeed he had," she concluded, with a sigh.

"I do not see how it can be possible for him to have known one peaceful moment since the day of his desertion of you in Rome," Edith remarked, with a grave, thoughtful face.

"I do not think he has," said her mother. "No one can be really at peace while leading a life of sin and selfish indulgence. I would rather, a thousand times, have lived my life, saddened and overshadowed by a great wrong and a lasting disgrace—as I have believed it to be—than to have exchanged places with either Gerald Goddard or Anna Correlli."

"How relieved you must have been when you met Mr. Forsyth and learned that your marriage had been a legal one," Edith observed, while she uttered a sigh of gratitude as she realized that thus all reproach had also been removed from her.

"Indeed I was, love; but more on your account than mine. And I immediately returned to America to prove it, and then reveal to my dear old friend, Edith, the fact that no stigma rested upon the birth of the child whom she had so nobly adopted as her own. Poor Edith! I loved her with all my heart," interposed the

fair woman, with starting tears. "I wish I might have seen her once more, to bless her, from the depths of my grateful soul, for having so sacredly treasured the jewel that I committed to her care. If I could but have known two years earlier, and found her, she never need have suffered the privations which I am sure hastened her untimely death. You, too, my darling, would have been spared the wretched experience of which you have told me."

"I do not mind so much for myself, but was in despair sometimes to see how much mamma missed and needed the comforts to which she had always been accustomed," said Edith, the tears rolling over her cheeks as she remembered the patient sufferer who never murmured, even when she was enduring the pangs of hunger.

"Well, dear, do not grieve," said Mrs. Stewart, folding her in a fond embrace. "I know, from what you have told me, that you did your utmost to shield her from every ill; and, judging from what you have said regarding the state of her health at the time of Mr. Allandale's death, I believe she could not have lived very much longer, even under the most favorable circumstances. Now, my child," she continued, more brightly, and to distract the girl's thoughts from the sad past, "since everything is all explained, tell me something about these new friends of whom you have spoken—Mr. Bryant, Mrs. Morrell and Mr. Raymond."

Edith blushed rosily at the mention of her lover's name, and almost involuntarily she slipped her hand into her pocket and clasped a letter that lay concealed there.

"Mr. Bryant is the gentleman in whose office I was working at the time of mamma's death," she explained. "He, too, was the one who was so kind when I got into trouble with the five-dollar gold piece, and so it was to him I applied for advice, after escaping from Emil Correlli."

"Ah!" simply remarked Mrs. Stewart, but she was quick to observe the shy smile that hovered about the beautiful girl's mouth while she was speaking of Roy.

"I telegraphed him to meet me when I should arrive in New York," Edith resumed, "because I knew it would be late, and I did not know where it would be best for me to go. He did so, and took me directly to his cousin, and that is how I happened to be with Mrs. Morrell."

Mrs. Stewart put one taper finger beneath Edith's pretty, round chin, and gently lifting her downcast face, looked searchingly into her eyes.

"Darling, you are very fond of Mr. Bryant, are you not?" she softly questioned.

Instantly the fair face was dyed crimson, and, dropping her head upon her mother's shoulder, she murmured:

"How can I help it?"

"And he is going to win my daughter from me? I hope he is worthy."

"Oh, he is noble to the core of his heart," was the earnest reply.

"I believe he must be, dear, or you could not love him," smilingly returned her companion, adding: "At all events, he has been very kind and faithful to you, and therefore deserves my everlasting gratitude. Now tell me of this Mr. Raymond."

So Edith proceeded to relate the story of that gentleman's unfortunate love for and devotion to Mrs. Allandale; his recent quest for her, after learning of Mr. Allandale's misfortune and death, in order to leave his money to her; and how, after learning from Roy that she had died, he had then advertised for herself, and, since her return to New York, had settled the half of his fortune upon her.

"Really, it is like a romance, dear," said Mrs. Stewart, smiling, though somewhat sadly, when she concluded her pathetic tale. "To think that, after all, I should find my little girl an heiress in her own right! What a rich little body you will be by and by, when you also come in possession of your mother's inheritance," she added, lightly.

"Oh, pray do not suggest such a thought!" cried Edith, clinging to her. "All the wealth of the world could not make up to me the loss of my mother. Now that we have found each other, pray Heaven that we may be spared many, many years to enjoy our happiness."

"Forgive me, Edith—I should not have spoken like that," said Mrs. Stewart, bending forward to kiss the sweet, pained face beside her. "We will not begin to apprehend a parting in this first hour of our joy. Now I suppose we ought to consider what relationship we are going to sustain to each other in the future, before the world. Of course, neither of us would enjoy the notoriety which a true statement of our affairs would entail; at the same time, having found you, my darling, I feel that I can never allow you to call me anything but 'mother'—which is music to my hungry ears."

"No, indeed—I can never be denied the privilege of owning you," cried Edith,

earnestly.

"Well, then, suppose you submit to a second adoption?" Mrs. Stewart suggested. "It will be very easy, and perfectly truthful, to state that, having been a dear friend of Mrs. Allandale's youth, and returning from abroad to find you alone in the world, I solicited the privilege of adopting the child of my old schoolmate and providing for her future. Such an arrangement would appear perfectly natural to the world, and no one could criticise us for loving each other just as tenderly as we choose, or question your right to give me the title I desire. What do you say, dear?"

"I think the plan a very nice one, and agree to it with all my heart," Edith eagerly responded.

"Then we will proceed to carry it out immediately, for I am very impatient to set up an establishment of my own, and introduce my darling daughter to society," smilingly returned Mrs. Stewart; adding, as she observed her somewhat curiously, "Are you fond of society and gay life, Edith?"

"Y-es, to a certain extent," was the rather thoughtful reply.

"How am I to interpret that slightly indefinite remark?" Mrs. Stewart playfully inquired. "Most girls are only too eager for fashionable life."

"And I used to enjoy it exceedingly," said the young girl, gravely, "but I have had an opportunity to see the other side during the last two years, and my ideas regarding what constitutes true enjoyment and happiness have become somewhat modified. I am sure that I shall still enjoy refined society; but, mother, dear, if your means are so ample, and you intend to set up an establishment of your own, let us, at the outset, take a stand in the social world that no one can mistake, and maintain it most rigidly."

"A 'stand,' Edith! I don't quite clearly comprehend your meaning," said Mrs. Stewart, as she paused an instant.

"I mean regarding the people with whom we will and will not mingle. Have you ever heard of Paula Nelson, mother?"

"Yes, dear; I met her only a few evenings ago, at the house of Mrs. Raymond Ventnor; she is a noble woman, with a noble mission. I begin to comprehend you now, Edith."

"Then let us join her, heart and hand—let us take our stand for chastity and morality," Edith earnestly resumed. "Let us pledge ourselves never to admit within our doors any man who bears the reputation of being immoral, or who lightly esteems the purity of any woman, however humble; while, on the other hand, let us never refuse to hold out a helping hand to those poor, unfortunate girls, who, having once been deceived, honestly desire to rise above their mistake."

"That is bravely spoken, my noble Edith," said Mrs. Stewart, with dewy eyes. "And surely I, who have so much greater cause for taking such a stand than you, will second you most heartily in maintaining it in our future home. I believe that such a determination on the part of every pure woman, would soon make a radical change in the tone of society."

Both were silent for a few moments after this, but finally Edith turned to her companion and inquired:

"Mother, dear, where is Mr. Willard Livermore—the gentleman who rescued you from the Tiber—and his sister, also, who cared for you so faithfully during your long illness?"

"Alice Livermore is in Philadelphia, where she has long been practicing medicine for sweet charity's sake. Mr. Livermore is—here in New York," Mrs. Stewart responded, but flushing slightly as she spoke the name of the gentleman.

Something in her tone caused Edith to glance up curiously into her face, and she read there, in the lovely flush and tender eye, which told her that her mother regarded her deliverer with a sentiment far stronger and deeper than that of mere gratitude or admiration.

"Ah! you—" she began, impulsively, and then stopped, confused.

"Yes, love," confessed the beautiful woman, with shining eyes, "I will have no secrets from you—we both love each other with an everlasting love; for long years this has been so; and had we been sure that there existed no obstacle to our union, it is probable that I should have married Mr. Livermore long ago. But we both believe in the Bible ritual, and those words, 'until death doth part,' have been a barrier which neither of us was willing to overleap. Each knows the heart of the other; and, though it sometimes seems hard that our lives must be divided, when our tastes are so congenial in every particular, yet we have mutually decided that only as 'friends' have we the right to clasp hands and greet each

other in this world."

Edith put up her lips and softly kissed the flushed cheek nearest her.

"How I love and honor you!" she whispered.

"We will never speak about this again, if you please, dear," said Isabel Stewart, in a slightly tremulous tone. "I wished you to know the truth, but I cannot talk about it. I do not deny the affection; that is something over which I have no control; but I can at least say 'thus far and no farther,' for the sake of conscience and self-respect. Now, about that letter which was handed to you to-day," she continued, suddenly changing the subject. "Suppose we look it over again, and then I think it should go directly into the hands of Mr. Bryant."

She had hardly finished speaking when there came a knock upon her door.

Rising, she opened it, to find a servant standing without and waiting to deliver a card that lay upon a silver salver.

Mrs. Stewart took it and read the name of Royal Bryant, together with the following lines, written in pencil:

"Will Mrs. Stewart kindly excuse this seeming intrusion of a stranger? but I understand that Miss Allandale is with you, and it is necessary that I have a few moments' conversation with her.

R. B."

"Show the gentleman up," the lady quietly remarked to the servant, then stepped back into the room and passed the card to Edith.

The young girl's eyes lighted with sudden joy, and the quick color flushed her cheeks, betraying how even the sight of Roy's name and handwriting had power to move her.

A few moments later there came another tap to tell her that her dear one was awaiting admittance, and she herself went to receive him.

"Roy! I am so glad you have come!" she exclaimed, holding out both hands to him, her face radiant with happiness.





## **CHAPTER XXXVII.**

## **"MY DARLING, YOU ARE FREE!"**

The young man regarded her with astonishment, for she had never greeted him so warmly before.

Edith saw his look and met it with a blush. She took his hat, then led him directly to Mrs. Stewart.

"Roy, you will be astonished," she remarked, "but my first duty is to introduce you to—my mother."

With a look of blank amazement, the young man mechanically put out his hand to greet the beautiful woman who approached and graciously welcomed him.

"That was rather an abrupt and startling announcement, Mr. Bryant," she smilingly remarked, to cover his confusion; "but pray be seated and we will soon explain the mysterious situation."

"Pardon my bewilderment," said the young man, as he bowed over her extended hand; "but really, ladies, I am free to confess that you have almost taken my breath away."

"Then you will know how to sympathize with us," cried Edith, with a silvery little laugh, "for we have both been in the same condition during the last few hours."

"Indeed! Then I must say you look very bright for a person who has not breathed for 'hours,'" he retorted, as he began to recover himself.

"Well, figuratively speaking, our respiration has been retarded many times, during a short interval, by the strangest developments imaginable," Edith explained. "But how did you trace me to the Waldorf?"

"I had something important to tell you, so ran up to Nellie's to see you, but was told that you had accompanied Mrs. Stewart thither," Roy explained. "I hope, however, I shall be pardoned for interrupting your interview," he concluded with an apologetic glance at the elder lady.

"Certainly; and, strange to say, we were speaking of you almost at the moment

that your card was brought to us," she returned. "Edith has had an important communication handed her to-day, which I thought you ought to have, since you are her attorney, without any unnecessary delay."

"Oh! it is most wonderful, Roy! This is it," said the young girl, producing it from her pocket. "But first I must tell you that in Mrs. Stewart I have discovered mamma's old friend—the writer of those letters of which I told you. She did not die in Rome, as was feared."

"Can that be possible?" exclaimed Mr. Bryant.

"Yes, dear. It is a long story, and I cannot stop to tell it all now," Edith went on, eagerly, "but I must explain that she has discovered an important document that proves what makes me the happiest girl in New York to-day. We met at Mrs. Wallace's this afternoon, where some one addressed me as Miss Allandale, when she instantly knew that I must be her child. Isn't it all too wonderful to seem true?"

After chatting a little longer over the wonderful revelations, he suddenly remembered the "important communication" which Mrs. Stewart had mentioned.

"What was the matter of business which you felt needed early consideration?" he inquired.

Instantly Edith's lovely face was suffused with blushes, and Mrs. Stewart, thinking it would be wise to leave the lovers alone during the forthcoming explanations, excused herself and quietly slipped into an adjoining room.

Edith immediately went to the young man's side and gave her letter to him.

"Roy, this is even more wonderful than what I have already told you," she gravely remarked. "Read it; it will explain itself better than any words of mine can do."

He drew the contents from the envelope, and began at once to read the following confession:

"For the sake of performing one right act in my life, I wish to make the following statement, namely: I hereby declare that the marriage of my brother, Emil Correlli, to Miss Edith Allen, who, for several weeks, has acted as my companion, was not a legal ceremony, inasmuch as it was accomplished solely by fraud and treachery. Miss Allen was tricked into it

by being overpersuaded to personate a supposed character in a play, entitled 'The Masked Bridal.' The play was written and acted before a large audience for the sole purpose of deceiving Miss Allen and making her the wife of my brother, whom she had absolutely refused to marry, but who was determined to carry his point at all hazards. Motives of affection for him, and of jealousy, on account of my husband's apparent fondness for the girl, alone prompted me to aid him in his bold design. I hereby declare again that it was all a trick, from beginning to end, and it was only by my indomitable will, and by working upon Miss Allen's sympathies, that I was enabled to carry out my purpose." (Then followed a detailed account of the plot of the play and its concluding ceremony, after which the document closed as follows): "I am impressed that I have not long to live; and wishing, if it can be done, to right this great wrong, and make it possible for the proper officials to declare Miss Allen freed from her bonds, I make this confession of a fraud that weighs too heavily upon my conscience to be borne.

"ANNA CORRELLI  
GODDARD."

The above was dated the day previous to that of madam's death, and underneath she had appended a few lines to Mr. Goddard, stating that she knew he was in sympathy with Edith; therefore she should leave the epistle with her lawyer, to be given to him, in the event of her death, and she enjoined him to see that justice was done the girl whom she had injured.

This was the missive that the lawyer had passed to Mr. Goddard at the same time that he had read the woman's will in the presence of her husband and Emil Correlli, and over which, as we have seen, he afterward became so strangely agitated.

We know how he had hurriedly removed from his former elegant home to a habitation on another street; after which, instead of going abroad, as the papers had stated, he had gone directly to New York, upon the same quest as Emil Correlli, but with a very different purpose in view—that of giving to Edith the precious document that was to declare her free from the man whom she loathed.

He could get no trace of her, however; unlike Correlli, he had no knowledge of her acquaintance with Royal Bryant, and therefore all he could do was to carry the letter about with him, wherever he went, in the hope of some day meeting her upon the street, or elsewhere.

One day he was out at Central Park, when he suddenly came upon a former friend—Mrs. Wallace—who immediately announced to him her intention of arranging a charitable art exhibition and solicited contributions from him to aid her in the good work.

Thus the appearance of that bit of old "Roman Wall" is accounted for, as well as the presence of Mr. Goddard himself, who was particularly requested by Mrs. Wallace to honor the occasion, and allow her to introduce him to some of her friends.

It would be difficult to describe the terrible shock which the man sustained when he heard Edith addressed by and respond to the name—Miss Allandale.

Like a flash of light it was revealed to him that the beautiful girl was his own daughter!—that, in her, he had, for months, been "entertaining an angel unawares," but only to abuse his privilege in a way to reap her lasting contempt and aversion.

This blighting knowledge was followed by a sense of sickening despair and misery, when, almost at the same moment, he saw Isabel Stewart start forward to claim her child and lead her from the room, when he knew she must learn the wretched truth regarding his life of selfishness and sin.

As they disappeared from sight, he sank back behind the easel that supported his Roman picture, groaning in spirit with remorse and humiliation.

A little later he stole unseen from the room, and, crossing the hall, opened the door of the reception-room, which he had seen Edith and her mother enter.

He had determined to give the young girl the letter that would serve to release her from her hateful fetters; he would, perhaps, experience some comfort in the thought that he had rendered her this one simple service that would bring her happiness; then he would go away—hide himself and his misery from all who knew him, and live out his future to what purpose he could.

We know how he carried out his resolve regarding the confession of Anna Correlli; and the picture which met his eye, as he opened that door and looked upon the mother and daughter clasped in each other's arms, was one that haunted his memory during the rest of his life.

As soon as Royal Bryant comprehended the import of Anna Correlli's confession, he turned to Edith with a radiant face and open arms.

"My darling! nothing can keep us apart now!" he murmured, in tones vibrant with joy, "you are free—free as the air you breathe—free to give yourself to me! Come!"

With a smile of love and happiness Edith sprang into his embrace and laid her face upon his breast.

"Oh, Roy!" she breathed, "all this seems too much joy to be real or to be borne in one day!"

"I think we can manage to endure it," returned her lover, with a fond smile. "I confess, however, that it seems like a day especially dedicated to blessings, for I have other good news for you."

"Can it be possible? What more could I ask, or even think of?" exclaimed Edith, wonderingly.

Roy smiled mysteriously, and returned, with a roguish gleam in his eyes:

"My news will keep a while—until you give me the pledge I crave, my darling. You will be my wife, Edith?" he added, with tender earnestness.

"You know that I will, Roy," she whispered; and, lifting her face to his, their mutual vows were sealed by their betrothal caress.

The young man drew from an inner pocket a tiny circlet of gold in which there blazed a flawless stone, clear as a drop of dew, and slipped it upon the third finger of Edith's left hand.

"I have had it ever since the day after your arrival in New York," he smilingly remarked, "but coward conscience would not allow me to give it to you; however, it will prove to you that I was lacking in neither faith nor hope."

"Now for my good news," he added, after Edith had thanked him, in a shy, sweet way that thrilled him anew, while he gently drew her to a seat. "I met Giulia Fiorini on the street this afternoon."

"Oh, Roy! did you?"

"Yes; she is here, searching for Correlli. I recognized her and the child from your description. I boldly resolved to address her, as I feared it might be my only opportunity. I did so, asking if I was right in supposing her to be Madam Fiorini, and told her that I was searching for her, at your request. She almost wept at the

sound of your name, and eagerly inquired where she could find you. I took her to my office, where I told her what I wished to prove regarding her relations with Correlli, and that, if I could accomplish my purpose, it would give her and the child a claim upon him which he could not ignore. She at once frankly related her story to me, and stated that when they had first arrived in New York from Italy, Correlli had taken her to Madam ——'s boarding-house, where he had made arrangements for himself, wife and child—"

"Oh, then that settles the question of her claim upon him!" Edith here interposed, eagerly.

"Yes—if we can prove her statements, and I think we can; for when I told Giulia of my visit to madam, and how I had failed to elicit the slightest information from her, she said that she knew where one of the servants—who was in the house when she went there—could be found, for she had stumbled across the girl in the street and learned where she is now living. She gave me her address, and I went immediately to interview her. Luck was in my favor—the girl was at home, and remembered the 'pretty Italian girl, who was so sweet-spoken and polite;' she also knew where her previous fellow-servant could be found, and asserted that they would both be willing to swear that madam herself had told them to 'always to be very attentive to the handsome Italian's wife, for she made more out of them than out of any of her other boarders.' So, I flatter myself that I have gathered conclusive evidence against the man," Roy added, in a tone of satisfaction. "I shall interview Monsieur Correlli at once, and perhaps, when he realizes that his supposed claim upon you is null and void, he may be persuaded to do what is right regarding his wife and child."

The lovers then fell to talking of their own affairs, Edith relating what she had so recently learned from her mother, and concluded by mentioning the plan of readoption, suggested by Mrs. Stewart, in order to avoid the gossip of the world.

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## **CHAPTER XXXVIII.**



## AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

The morning following his conference with his betrothed, our young lawyer went early to seek an interview with Emil Correlli.

He was fortunate enough to find him at the hotel where he had told him he could be found if wanted.

In a few terse sentences he stated the object of his visit, cited the evidence he possessed of Correlli's bigamous exploit, and then startled that audacious person by summarizing the contents of the late Mrs. Goddard's confession.

"If you are not already sure of the fact," the lawyer emphatically added, "allow me to inform you that your sister was never the wife of Mr. Gerald Goddard, as that gentleman had been married previous to his meeting with Miss Correlli. It was supposed that his first wife was drowned in Rome, but the report was false, as the woman is still living."

"I do not believe it," angrily exclaimed Emil Correlli, and yet, in his heart, he felt that it was true, for it but verified his own previous suspicions. "I tell you it is all a lie, for Goddard himself told me, only two days after my sister's death, that, if I chose to look, I would find the record of his marriage to her in the books of the — Church in Rome."

"That is true; Mr. Goddard supposed the marriage to have been legal, because, at the time he deserted his lovely wife for Miss Correlli, he did not know that he was lawfully bound to her. But, later, both he and your sister learned the truth, and the secret of their unfortunate relations embittered the lives of both, especially after they discovered that the real Mrs. Goddard is still living," Roy exclaimed.

"How do you know this?" hoarsely demanded his companion.

"I have recently seen and conversed with Mrs. Goddard, and all the facts of her history are in my possession."

"Who is she? Under what name is she known?"

"That is a question that I must refuse to answer, as the revelation of the lady's

identity cannot affect the case in hand; unless—it should come before the courts and the truth be forced from me," Roy replied.

"Then why have you told me this wretched story?" cried the man, almost savagely.

"A lawyer, in fighting his cases, is often obliged to use a variety of weapons," was the significant response. "I thought it might be just as well to warn you, at the outset, that your sister's reputation might suffer in the event of a lawsuit, during which much might be revealed which otherwise would remain a secret among ourselves."

To convince Correlli of the truth of his disclosures Mr. Bryant announced that he had in his possession, at that moment, a copy of Mrs. Goddard's confession, and proceeded to read it, having first declared that the original was in his office safe.

Emil Correlli, was ghastly white when Roy stopped, after reading the entire confession. He realized that his case was hopeless; that he had been ignominiously defeated in his scheme to possess Edith, and nothing remained to him but to submit to the inevitable.

"Now I have just one question to ask you, Mr. Correlli," Roy remarked, as he refolded the paper and laid it upon the table for him to examine at his leisure. "What is your decision? Will you still contest the point of Miss Allandale's freedom, or will you quietly withdraw your claim, and allow it to be publicly announced, through the Boston papers, that that ceremony in Wyoming was simply a farce after all?"

"You leave me no choice," was the sullen response; "but," with a murderous gleam in his dusky eyes, "if you had brought the original confession with you to-day, you would never have gone out of this house with it in your possession."

"Excuse me for contradicting you, sir; but I think I should," Roy returned, with the utmost courtesy. "I took all proper precautions before coming to you, as it was—although not because of any personal fear of you. No less than three persons in this house, and as many more outside, know of my visit to you at this hour. And, now, since you have decided to yield to my requirements, I have here some papers for you to sign."

He drew them forth as he spoke, spreading them out upon the table, after which he arose and touched the electric button over the mantel.

"What is that for?" curtly demanded his companion.

"To summon witnesses to your signature to these documents."

"Your assurance is something refreshing," sneered the elder man. "How do you know that I will sign them?"

"I feel very sure that you will, Mr. Correlli," was the quiet rejoinder; "for, in the event of your refusal, there is an officer in waiting to arrest you upon the two serious charges before mentioned."

The baffled man snarled in impotent rage; but before he could frame a retort, there came a knock on the door.

Roy answered it, and bade the servant without to "show up the gentlemen who were waiting in the office."

Five minutes later they appeared, when Emil Correlli, without a demur, signed the papers which Roy had brought and now read aloud in their presence.

His signature was then duly witnessed by them, after which they withdrew, Mr. Bryant's clerk, who was one of the number, taking the documents with him.

Roy, however, remained behind.

"Mr. Correlli," he said, as soon as the door closed, "I have one more request to make of you, before I leave; it is that you will openly acknowledge as your wife the woman you have wronged, and thus bestow upon your child the name which it is his right to bear."

"I will see them both—"

"Hush!" sternly interrupted Roy, before he could complete his passionate sentence. "I simply wish to give you the opportunity to do what is right, of your own free will. If you refuse, I shall do my utmost to compel you; and, mark my words, it can be done. That woman and her child are justly entitled to your name and support, and they shall have their rights, even though you may never look upon their faces again. I give you just one week to think over the matter. You can leave the country if you choose, and thus escape appearing in court; but you doubtless know what will happen if you do—the case will go by default, and Giulia and Ino will come off victors."

The man knew that what the lawyer said was true, but he was so enraged over

his inability to help himself that he was utterly reckless, and cried out, fiercely:

"Do your worst—I defy you to the last! And now, the quicker you relieve me of your presence the better I shall like it."

The young lawyer took up his hat, bowed politely to his defeated foe, and quietly left the room, very well satisfied with the result of his morning's work.

All the necessary forms of law were complied with to release Edith from even a seeming alliance with the man who had been so determined to win her.

An announcement was inserted in the Boston papers explaining as much as was deemed necessary, and thus the fair girl was free!—free to give herself to him whom her heart had chosen.

Then she was formally adopted by Mrs. Stewart, the old schoolmate of the late Mrs. Allandale, and a little later, when they were settled in their elegant residence on one of the fashionable avenues, society was bidden to a great feast to honor the new relationship and to congratulate the charming hostess and her beautiful daughter, who was thus restored to a position she was so well fitted to grace.

At the same time Edith's engagement to the young lawyer was announced, and it seemed to the happy young couple as if the future held for them only visions of joy.

True to his promise, Roy gave Emil Correlli the week specified to decide either for or against Giulia; then, not having heard from him, he instituted proceedings to establish her claim upon him.

Correlli did not appear to defend himself, consequently the court indorsed her petition and awarded her a handsome maintenance.

Once only Gerald Goddard met his daughter after she learned the facts relating to her birth and parentage.

They suddenly came face to face, one morning, in one of the up-town parks. He looked ill and wretched; his hair had become white as snow, his face thin and pale, and his clothing hung loosely about him.

"Pardon me," he began, in uncertain tones, while he searched her face wistfully. "No doubt you despise me too thoroughly to wish to hold any intercourse with

me; still, I feel that I must tell you how deeply I regret, and ask your pardon for, what occurred in the dressing-room at Wyoming on the last night of that 'winter frolic.'"

Edith's tender heart could not fail to experience a feeling of sympathy for the proud man in his humiliated and broken state. Remembering that it was through him that her blessed freedom from Emil Correlli and her present happiness had come, she forced herself to respond in a gentle tone:

"I have always felt, Mr. Goddard, that you were not fully conscious of what you were saying to me at that time."

"I was not," he eagerly returned, his face lighting a trifle that she should judge him thus leniently. "I had been drinking too much; still, that fact should, perhaps, also be a cause for shame. Pray assure me of your pardon for what I can never forgive myself."

"Certainly; I have no right to withhold it, in view of your apology," she responded.

"Thank you; and—and may I presume to ask you one question more?" he pleaded.

Edith's heart leaped into her throat at this, for she was impressed with a knowledge and a dread of what was coming.

For the moment she could not speak—she could only bow her assent to his request.

"I want to ask if—if, since you left my house, you have learned anything regarding my previous history?" he inquired, with pale lips.

"Yes," she said, sadly, "I know it all. My mother told me only because I demanded the truth. She would have preferred to keep some things from me, for your sake as well as mine, but I could not be satisfied with any partial disclosure."

"How you must hate me!" the man burst forth, while great drops of agony gathered about his mouth.

He had never believed that a human being could suffer as he suffered at that moment, in knowing that by his own vileness he had forever barred himself

outside the affections of this lovely girl, toward whom he had always—since the first hour of their meeting—been strangely attracted, and whose love and respect, now that he knew she was his own child, seemed the most priceless boons that earth could hold for him.

At first Edith could make no reply to his passionate outburst.

"No," she said, at last, and lifting a regretful look to him, "I hope that there is not an atom of 'hate' in my heart toward any human being, especially toward any one who might experience an honest, though late, repentance for misdeeds."

"Ah! thank you; then have you not some word of comfort—some message of peace for me?" tremulously pleaded the once haughty, self-sufficient man, while he half extended his hands toward her, in a gesture of entreaty.

Her lips quivered, and tears sprang involuntarily to her eyes, while it was only after a prolonged effort that she was able to respond.

"Yes," she said, at last, a solemn sweetness in her unsteady tones, "the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace."

She often wondered afterward how it happened that those words of blessing, once uttered by a patriarch of old, should have slipped almost unconsciously from her lips.

She did not even wait to note their effect upon her companion, but, gliding swiftly past him, went on her way.



## **CHAPTER XXXIX.**

## CONCLUSION.

Three months after the incidents related in our previous chapter a large and fashionable audience assembled, one bright day, in a certain church on Madison avenue to witness a marriage that had been anticipated with considerable interest and curiosity among the smart set.

Exactly at the last stroke of noon the bridal party passed down the central aisle.

It was composed of four ushers, as many bridesmaids a maid of honor and two stately, graceful figures in snow-white apparel.

One of these latter was a veiled bride, her tall, willowy figure clad in gleaming satin, her golden head crowned with natural orange blossoms, and she carried an exquisite bouquet of the same fragrant flowers in her ungloved hands—for the groom had forbidden the conventional white kids in this ceremony—while on her lovely face there was a light and sweetness which only perfect happiness could have painted there.

Her companion, a woman of regal presence and equally beautiful in her way, was clothed in costly white velvet, richly garnished with pearls and rare old point lace.

The fair bride and her attendant were no other than Isabel Stewart and her daughter.

"Who should give away my darling save her own mother?" she had questioned, with smiling but tremulous lips, when this matter was being discussed, together with other preparations for the wedding.

Edith was delighted with the idea, and thus it was carried out in the way described.

The party was met at the chancel by Roy, accompanied by his best man and the clergyman, where the ceremony was impressively performed, after which the happy couple led the way from the church with those sweetest strains of Mendelssohn beating their melodious rhythm upon their ears and joyful hearts.

It was an occasion for only smiles and gladness; but, away in a dim corner of



that vast edifice, there sat a solitary figure, with bowed head and pale face, over which—as there fell upon his ears those solemn words, "till death us do part"—hot tears streamed like rain.

The figure was Gerald Goddard. He had read the announcement of Edith's marriage in the papers, and, with an irresistible yearning to see her in her bridal robes, he had stolen into the church with the crowd, and hidden himself where he could see without being seen.

But the scene was too much for him, for, as he watched that peerless woman and her beautiful daughter move down the aisle, and listened to the reverent responses of the young couple, there came to him, with terrible force, the consciousness that if he had been true to the same vows which he had once taken upon himself he need not now have been shut out of this happy scene, like some lost soul shut out of heaven.

But no one heeded him; and, when the ceremony was over, he slipped away as secretly as he had come, and no one dreamed that the father of the beautiful bride had been an unbidden guest at her wedding.

In giving Edith to Roy Mrs. Stewart had begged that she need not be separated from her newly recovered treasure—that for the present, at least, they would make their home with her—or, rather, that they would take the house, which was to be a part of Edith's dowry, and allow her to remain with them as their guest.

This they were only too glad to do; therefore, after a delightful wedding trip through the West, they came back to their elegant home, where, with every luxury at their command, the future seemed to promise unlimited happiness.

Poor Louis Raymond had failed very rapidly during the spring months; indeed, he was not even able to attend the marriage of the girl for whom he had formed a strong attachment, and who had bestowed upon him many gracious attentions and services that had greatly brightened his last days. He passed quietly away only a few weeks after their return to New York.

One day, a couple of months after her marriage, Edith was about to step into her carriage, on coming out of a store on Broadway, where she had been shopping, when she was startled by excited shouts and cries directly across the street from her.

Turning to see what had caused the commotion, she saw a heavily loaded team

just toppling over, while a man, who had been in the act of crossing the street, was borne down under it, and, with a shriek which she never forgot, apparently crushed to death.

Sick and faint with horror, she crept into her carriage, and ordered her driver to get away from the dreadful scene as soon as possible.

That same evening, as she was looking over the *Telegram*, a low cry of astonishment broke from her, as she read the following paragraph:

"A sad accident occurred on Broadway this morning. A carelessly loaded team was overturned by its own top-heaviness as it was rounding the corner of Twenty-ninth street, crushing beneath its cruel weight the talented young sculptor, Emil Correlli. Both legs were broken, one in two places, and it is feared that he has suffered fatal internal injuries. He was taken in an unconscious state to the Roosevelt Hospital, where he now lies hovering between life and death. The surgeons have little hope of his recovery."

Edith was greatly shocked by the account, notwithstanding her aversion to the man.

She had not supposed that he was in the city, for Roy believed that he had left the country, rather than appear to defend himself against Giulia's claims, and to escape paying the damages the court awarded her, after proclaiming her his lawful wife.

The woman had since been supporting herself and her child by designing and making dainty costumes for children, a vocation to which she seemed especially adapted, and by which she was making a good living, through the recommendation of both Mrs. Stewart and Edith.

The day after the accident Roy, on his way home from his office, prompted by a feeling of humanity, went to the Roosevelt Hospital to inquire for the injured man.

The surgeon looked grave when he made known his errand.

"There is hardly a ray of hope for him," he remarked; "he is still unconscious. Do you know anything about him or his family?" he asked, with sudden interest.

"Yes, I have had some acquaintance with him," Roy returned.

"Do you know his wife?" the man pursued. "A woman came here last evening, claiming to be his wife, and insisting upon remaining by his bedside as long as he should live."

"Yes, he has a wife," the young man briefly returned, but deeply touched by this evidence of Giulia's devotion.

"Is she a dark, foreign-looking lady, of medium height, rather handsome, and with a slight accent in her speech?"

"That answers exactly to her description."

"I am glad to know it, for we have been in some doubt as to the propriety of allowing her to remain with our patient. We tried to make her leave him, last night, even threatening to have her forcibly removed; but she simply would not go, and is remarkably handy in assisting the nurse, while her self-control is simply wonderful."

Roy wrote a few lines on one of his cards, saying that if either he or Mrs. Bryant could be of any service at this trying time, she might be free to call upon them.

This he gave to the surgeon to hand to Giulia, and then went away.

The following evening the woman made her appearance in their home with her child, whom she begged them to care for "as long as Emil should live."

It could not be very long, she said, with streaming eyes. She loved him still, in spite of everything, and she must remain with him while he breathed.

Edith willingly received Ino, saying she would be glad to keep him as long as was necessary; then Giulia went immediately back to her sad vigils beside the man who had caused her nothing but sorrow and shame.

But Emil Correlli did not die.

Very slowly and painfully he came back to life—to an existence, rather, from which he would gladly have escaped when he realized what it was to be.

When he first awakened to consciousness it was to find a pale, patient woman beside him—one who met his sighs and moans with gentle sympathy, and who ministered tirelessly to his every need and comfort.

No other hand was so cool and soft upon his heated head, or so deft to arrange

his covers and pillows; no voice was so gently modulated yet so invariably cheerful—no step so quick and light; and, though the querulous invalid often frowned upon her, and chided her sharply for imaginary remissness, she never wavered in her sweetness and gentleness.

Thus, little by little, the selfish man grew to appreciate her and to yearn for her presence, if she was forced to be out of his sight for even a few minutes at a time.

"She has saved your life—she has almost forced life upon you," the surgeon remarked to him one day, when, as he came to make his accustomed visit, Giulia slipped away for a moment of rest and a breath of fresh air.

The invalid frowned. It was not exactly pleasant to be told that he owed such a debt of gratitude to the woman he had wronged. He was too callous to experience very much of gratitude as yet. It was only when he was pronounced well enough to be moved, and informed that he must make arrangements to be cared for outside, in order to make room for more urgent cases, that he began to wonder how he should get along without his faithful nurse and to realize how dependent he was upon her.

He knew that he would be a cripple for life; his broken bones had knitted nicely, and his limbs would be as sound as ever, in time; but his spine had been injured, and he would never walk upright again—henceforth he would only be able to get about upon crutches.

How, then, could he live without some one to wait upon him and bear with him in his future state of helplessness?

"Where shall I go?" he questioned, querulously, when, later, he told Giulia that his removal had been ordered. "A hotel is the most dismal place in the world for a sick man."

"Emil, how would you like a home of your own?" Giulia gravely inquired.

The word "home" thrilled him strangely, making him think yearningly of his mother and the comforts of his childhood, and an irresistible longing took possession of him.

"A home!" he repeated, bitterly. "How on earth could I make a home for myself?"

"I will make it for you—I will go to take care of you in it, if you like," she quietly answered.

"You!" he exclaimed in surprise, while, with sudden discernment, he remarked a certain refined beauty in her face that he had never observed before.

Then he added, with a sullen glance at his useless limbs, a strange sense of shame creeping over him:

"Do you still care enough for me to take that trouble?"

"I am willing to do my duty, Emil," she gravely replied.

"Ha! you evade me!" he cried, sharply, and piqued by her answer. "Tell me truly, Giulia, do you still love me well enough to be willing to devote your life to such a misshapen wretch as I shall always be?"

The woman turned her face away from him, to hide the sudden light of hope that leaped into her eyes at his words, which she fancied had in them a note of appeal.

But she had been learning wisdom during her long weeks of service in the hospital—learning that anything, to be appreciated, must be hardly won; and so she answered as before, without betraying a sign of the eager desire that had taken root in her heart:

"I told you, Emil, that I was willing to do my duty. I bear your name—you are Ino's father—my proper place is in your home; and if you see fit to decide that we shall all live together under the same roof, I will do my utmost to make you comfortable, and your future as pleasant as possible. More than that I cannot promise—now."

"And you really mean this, Giulia?" he questioned, in a low tone.

"Yes, if my proposal meets with your approval, we can at least make the experiment. If it should not prove a success, we can easily abandon it whenever you choose."

He knew that he could not do without her—knew that she had become so essential to him that he was appalled at the mere thought of losing her, while the sound of that magic word "home," around which clustered everything that was comfortable and attractive, opened before him the promise of something better

than he had ever yet known in life.

Let us slip over the six months following, to find this little family pleasantly settled in an elegant villa a few miles up the Hudson.

It is replete with every luxury that money can purchase.

The choicest in art of every description decorates its walls, and pleasant, sunny rooms, while in a spacious studio, opening out upon a wide lawn, may be seen numerous unfinished pieces of statuary, upon which the crippled but ambitious master of the house has already begun to work, although his strength will permit him to do but little at a time.

Giulia, or "Madame Correlli," as she is now known, is the presiding genius of this ideal spot, and she fills her place with both dignity and grace; while her watchful care and never-failing patience and cheerfulness are beginning to assert their charm upon the man to whom she is devoting herself, as is noticeable in his many efforts to make life pleasant to her, in his frequent appeals to her judgment and approval of his work, and the courtesy which he invariably accords her.

Ino has grown, although he is still a beautiful child—very bright and forward for his age, and a source of great enjoyment to his father, who, even now, has begun to direct his tiny hands in the use of the mallet and chisel.



It was more than a year after her marriage that Edith, accompanied by her mother, visited the annual exhibition of the ——— Academy of Art.

Among the numerous pictures which were shown there were two which attracted more attention than all the others. They were evidently intended as companion-pieces, and had been painted by the same artist.

The scene was laid in an avenue of a park. On either side there grew beautiful, great trees, whose widespread branches made graceful shadows on the graveled walk beneath. In the center of this avenue—in the first picture—two figures stood facing each other; one an elderly man, proud and haughty in his bearing, richly dressed and with a certain air of the world investing him, but with a face—although possessing great natural beauty—so wretched and full of remorse, so lined and seamed with soul-anguish, that the heart of every beholder was

instantly moved to deepest sympathy.

Before him stood a beautiful maiden who was the embodiment of all that was pure and happy. Her face was lovely beyond description—its every feature perfect, its expression full of sweetness and peace, while a divine pity and yearning shone forth from her heavenly blue eyes, which were upraised to the despairing countenance of her companion.

Her dress was simple white, belted at the waist with a girdle and flowing ends of gleaming satin ribbon, while a dainty straw hat, from which a single white plume drooped gracefully, crowned her golden head.

The gentleman was standing with outstretched hands, as if in the act of making some appeal to the fair girl, whose grave sweetness, while it suggested no yielding, yet indicated pity and sorrow for the other's suffering.

The second picture presented the same figures, but its import was entirely different.

Away down the avenue, the young girl, looking even more fair and graceful, was just passing out of sight, while the gentleman had turned and was gazing after her, a rapt expression on his face, the misery all obliterated from it, the despair all gone from his eyes, while in their place there had dawned a look of resignation and peace, and a faint smile even seemed to hover about the previously pain-lined mouth, which told that he had just learned some lesson from his vanishing angel that had changed the whole future for him.

As Edith looked upon these paintings, which betrayed a master-hand in every stroke of the brush, a rush of tears blinded her eyes, for she instantly recognized the scene, although there had been no attempt at portraiture in the faces, and she read at once the story they were intended to reveal.

They were catalogued as "Unrest" and "Peace."

She knew, even before she discovered the initials—"G. G."—in one corner, that Gerald Goddard had painted these pictures, and that he had taken for his subject their meeting in the park the previous year.

They took the first prize, and the artist immediately received numerous and flattering offers for them, but his agent replied to all such that the pictures were not for sale.

A month later a sealed package was delivered at Edith's door, and it was addressed to her.

Upon opening it she found a document bequeathing to her two paintings, lately exhibited at the Academy, which would be delivered to her upon application to a certain art dealer in the city, whose address was inclosed. The communication stated that she was free to make whatever disposition of them she saw fit.

Upon a heavy card accompanying them there was written the following words:

"The blessing of Aaron has been fulfilled. May the same peace rest upon thee and thine forever. G. G."

Upon inquiring about the pictures of the dealer referred to, Edith was informed that Gerald Goddard had died only the week previous of quick consumption, and his body had been quietly interred in Greenwood, according to his own instructions.

His two paintings, "Unrest" and "Peace," were left in the care of his friend, to be delivered to Mrs. Royal Bryant, whenever she should call for them.

Edith was deeply touched by this act, and by the fact that the man had devoted the remnant of his life to picturing that scene which seemed to have made such a deep impression upon his mind, while a feeling of thankfulness swelled in her heart with the thought that perhaps she had spoken the "word in season" that had helped to lead into the "paths of peace" the weary worlding, who, even then, was treading so swiftly toward the verge of the "Great Unknown."

Not many weeks later the New York *Herald* contained the following announcement:

"MARRIED.—On Wednesday, the 18th, the Honorable Willard Livermore to Mrs. Isabel Stewart, both of New York."

**THE END.**

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**DARNLEY.** A Romance of the times of Henry VIII. and Cardinal Wolsey. By G. P. R. James. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, \$1.00.

In point of publication, "Darnley" is that work by Mr. James which follows "Richelieu," and, if rumor can be credited, it was owing to the advice and insistence of our own Washington Irving that we are indebted primarily for the story, the young author questioning whether he could properly paint the difference in the characters of the two great cardinals. And it is not surprising that James should have hesitated; he had been eminently successful in giving to the world the portrait of Richelieu as a man, and by attempting a similar task with Wolsey as the theme, was much like tempting fortune. Irving insisted that "Darnley" came naturally in sequence, and this opinion being supported by Sir Walter Scott, the author set about the work.

As a historical romance "Darnley" is a book that can be taken up pleasurably again and again, for there is about it that subtle charm which those who are strangers to the works of G. P. R. James have claimed was only to be imparted

by Dumas.

If there was nothing more about the work to attract especial attention, the account of the meeting of the kings on the historic "field of the cloth of gold" would entitle the story to the most favorable consideration of every reader.

There is really but little pure romance in this story, for the author has taken care to imagine love passages only between those whom history has credited with having entertained the tender passion one for another, and he succeeds in making such lovers as all the world must love.

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The one book of this gifted author which is best remembered, and which will be read with pleasure for many years to come, is "Captain Brand," who, as the author states on his title page, was a "pirate of eminence in the West Indies." As a sea story pure and simple, "Captain Brand" has never been excelled, and as a story of piratical life, told without the usual embellishments of blood and thunder, it has no equal.

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"Windsor Castle" is the story of Henry VIII., Catharine, and Anne Boleyn. "Bluff King Hal," although a well-loved monarch, was none too good a one in many ways. Of all his selfishness and unwarrantable acts, none was more discreditable than his divorce from Catharine, and his marriage to the beautiful Anne Boleyn. The King's love was as brief as it was vehement. Jane Seymour, waiting maid on the Queen, attracted him, and Anne Boleyn was forced to the block to make room for her successor. This romance is one of extreme interest to all readers.

**HORSESHOE ROBINSON.** A tale of the Tory Ascendency in South Carolina in 1780. By John P. Kennedy. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, \$1.00.

Among the old favorites in the field of what is known as historical fiction, there are none which appeal to a larger number of Americans than Horseshoe Robinson, and this because it is the only story which depicts with fidelity to the facts the heroic efforts of the colonists in South Carolina to defend their homes against the brutal oppression of the British under such leaders as Cornwallis and Tarleton.

The reader is charmed with the story of love which forms the thread of the tale, and then impressed with the wealth of detail concerning those times. The picture of the manifold sufferings of the people, is never overdrawn, but painted faithfully and honestly by one who spared neither time nor labor in his efforts to present in this charming love story all that price in blood and tears which the Carolinians paid as their share in the winning of the republic.

Take it all in all, "Horseshoe Robinson" is a work which should be found on every book-shelf, not only because it is a most entertaining story, but because of the wealth of valuable information concerning the colonists which it contains. That it has been brought out once more, well illustrated, is something which will give pleasure to thousands who have long desired an opportunity to read the story again, and to the many who have tried vainly in these latter days to procure a copy that they might read it for the first time.

**THE PEARL OF ORR'S ISLAND.** A story of the Coast of Maine. By Harriet Beecher Stowe. Cloth, 12mo. Illustrated. Price, \$1.00.

Written prior to 1862, the "Pearl of Orr's Island" is ever new; a book filled with

delicate fancies, such as seemingly array themselves anew each time one reads them. One sees the "sea like an unbroken mirror all around the pine-girt, lonely shores of Orr's Island," and straightway comes "the heavy, hollow moan of the surf on the beach, like the wild angry howl of some savage animal."

Who can read of the beginning of that sweet life, named Mara, which came into this world under the very shadow of the Death angel's wings, without having an intense desire to know how the premature bud blossomed? Again and again one lingers over the descriptions of the character of that baby boy Moses, who came through the tempest, amid the angry billows, pillowed on his dead mother's breast.

There is no more faithful portrayal of New England life than that which Mrs. Stowe gives in "The Pearl of Orr's Island."

**GUY FAWKES.** A Romance of the Gunpowder Treason. By Wm. Harrison Ainsworth. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by George Cruikshank. Price, \$1.00.

The "Gunpowder Plot" was a modest attempt to blow up Parliament, the King and his Counsellors. James of Scotland, then King of England, was weak-minded and extravagant. He hit upon the efficient scheme of extorting money from the people by imposing taxes on the Catholics. In their natural resentment to this extortion, a handful of bold spirits concluded to overthrow the government. Finally the plotters were arrested, and the King put to torture Guy Fawkes and the other prisoners with royal vigor. A very intense love story runs through the entire romance.

**THE SPIRIT OF THE BORDER.** A Romance of the Early Settlers in the Ohio Valley. By Zane Grey. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, \$1.00.

A book rather out of the ordinary is this "Spirit of the Border." The main thread of the story has to do with the work of the Moravian missionaries in the Ohio Valley. Incidentally the reader is given details of the frontier life of those hardy pioneers who broke the wilderness for the planting of this great nation. Chief among these, as a matter of course, is Lewis Wetzel, one of the most peculiar, and at the same time the most admirable of all the brave men who spent their lives battling with the savage foe, that others might dwell in comparative security.

Details of the establishment and destruction of the Moravian "Village of Peace" are given at some length, and with minute description. The efforts to Christianize the Indians are described as they never have been before, and the author has depicted the characters of the leaders of the several Indian tribes with great care, which of itself will be of interest to the student.

By no means least among the charms of the story are the vivid word-pictures of the thrilling adventures, and the intense paintings of the beauties of nature, as seen in the almost unbroken forests.

It is the spirit of the frontier which is described, and one can by it, perhaps, the better understand why men, and women, too, willingly braved every privation and danger that the westward progress of the star of empire might be the more certain and rapid. A love story, simple and tender, runs through the book.

**RICHELIEU.** A tale of France in the reign of King Louis XIII. By G. P. R. James. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, \$1.00.

In 1829 Mr. James published his first romance, "Richelieu," and was recognized at once as one of the masters of the craft.

In this book he laid the story during those later days of the great cardinal's life, when his power was beginning to wane, but while it was yet sufficiently strong to permit now and then of volcanic outbursts which overwhelmed foes and carried friends to the topmost wave of prosperity. One of the most striking portions of the story is that of Cinq Mar's conspiracy; the method of conducting criminal cases, and the political trickery resorted to by royal favorites, affording a better insight into the state-craft of that day than can be had even by an exhaustive study of history. It is a powerful romance of love and diplomacy, and in point of thrilling and absorbing interest has never been excelled.

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was to him that Blanche Werden owed her life and her happiness, as the author has told us in such an enchanting manner.

As a series of pictures of early colonial life in Maryland, "Rob of the Bowl" has no equal. The story is full of splendid action, with a charming love story, and a plot that never loosens the grip of its interest to its last page.

**TICONDEROGA.** A Story of Early Frontier Life in the Mohawk Valley. By G. P. R. James. Cloth, 12mo. Four page illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, \$1.00.

The setting of the story is decidedly more picturesque than any ever evolved by Cooper. The story is located on the frontier of New York State. The principal characters in the story include an English gentleman, his beautiful daughter, Lord Howe, and certain Indian sachems belonging to the Five Nations, and the story ends with the Battle of Ticonderoga.

The character of Captain Brooks, who voluntarily decides to sacrifice his own life in order to save the son of the Englishman, is not among the least of the attractions of this story, which holds the attention of the reader even to the last page.

Interwoven with the plot is the Indian "blood" law, which demands a life for a life, whether it be that of the murderer or one of his race. A more charming story of mingled love and adventure has never been written than "Ticonderoga."

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Though much is made of the Massacre of Wyoming, a great portion of the tale describes the love making between Mary Derwent's sister, Walter Butler, and one of the defenders of Forty Fort.

This historical novel stands out bright and pleasing, because of the mystery and notoriety of several of the actors, the tender love scenes, descriptions of the different localities, and the struggles of the settlers. It holds the attention of the reader, even to the last page.

**THE LAST TRAIL.** A story of early days in the Ohio Valley. By Zane Grey. Cloth, 12mo. Four page illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, \$1.00.

"The Last Trail" is a story of the border. The scene is laid at Fort Henry, where Col. Ebenezer Zane with his family have built up a village despite the attacks of savages and renegades. The Colonel's brother and Wetzel, known as Deathwind by the Indians, are the bordermen who devote their lives to the welfare of the white people. A splendid love story runs through the book.

That Helen Sheppard, the heroine, should fall in love with such a brave, skilful scout as Jonathan Zane seems only reasonable after his years of association and defense of the people of the settlement from savages and renegades.

If one has a liking for stories of the trail, where the white man matches brains against savage cunning, for tales of ambush and constant striving for the mastery, "The Last Trail" will be greatly to his liking.

**THE KNIGHTS OF THE HORSESHOE.** A traditionary tale of the Cocked Hat Gentry in the Old Dominion. By Dr. Wm. A. Caruthers. Cloth, 12mo. Four page illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, \$1.00.

Many will hail with delight the re-publication of this rare and justly famous story of early American colonial life and old-time Virginian hospitality.

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