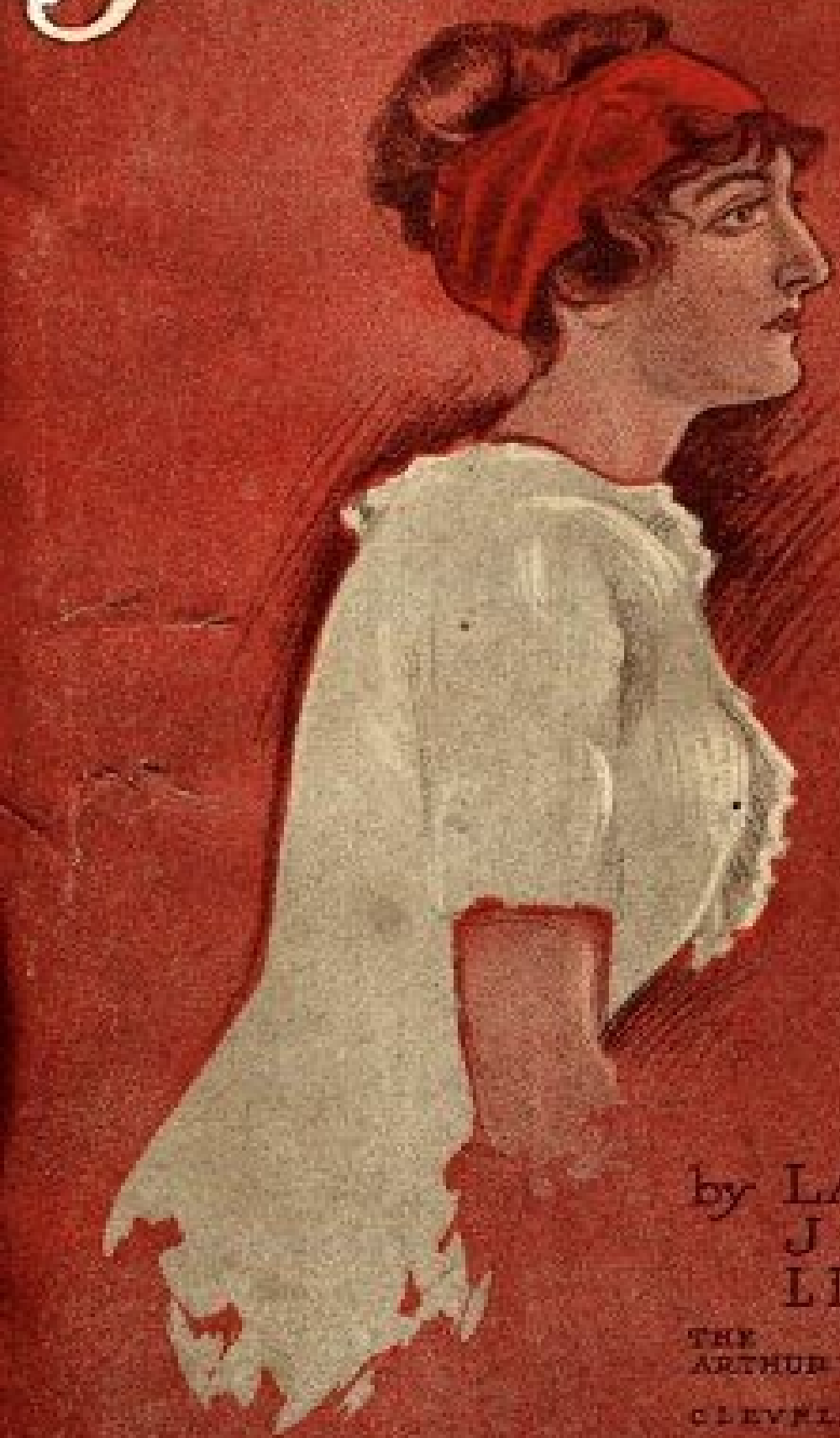
JOLLY SALLY PENDLETON



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OR

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HART SERIES No. 43

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THE WIFE WHO WAS NOT A WIFE

CHAPTER I.

BOTH GIRLS WERE SO
STUNNINGLY PRETTY, AND WORE
SUCH ODD, BEWITCHING
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THAT THE PEOPLE WHO STOPPED
TO WATCH THE BEAUTIES AS
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THEM "THE HEAVENLY TWINS."

As Jay Gardiner drove down the village street behind his handsome pair of prancing bays, holding the ribbons skillfully over them, all the village maidens promenading up the village street or sitting in groups on the porches turned to look at him.

He was certainly a handsome fellow; there was no denying that. He was tall, broad-shouldered, with a fair, handsome face, laughing blue eyes, a crisp, brown, curling mustache, and, what was better still, he was heir to two millions of money.

He was passing the summer at the fashionable little village of Lee, among the Berkshire Hills of Massachusetts.

That did more to advertise the place than all the glowing newspaper items the proprietor of the Summerset House could have paid for.

Every mother of a marriageable daughter who had heard of the millionaire managed to rake and scrape together enough money to pass the season at Lee.

It was laughable to see how adroitly these mothers managed to secure an introduction, upon one pretext or another, to the handsome millionaire. Then the daughters were duly brought forward and presented.

Every one knew the story of Jay Gardiner. His lady-mother and elder sister lived in what was called the Castle, the grandest and most famous homestead by far in

Great Barrington.

With all the millions at her command, haughty Mrs. Gardiner had but one great sorrow, and that was that her handsome son could not be induced to remain at home and lead the life of a fashionable young gentleman of leisure.

At college he had declared his intention of studying medicine. He had graduated with high honors, and, much to his mother's annoyance, had established himself as a full-fledged M. D.

If he had been poor, perhaps patients might not have come to him so readily; but as it was, he found himself launched at once into a lucrative practice.

This particular summer upon which our story opens, his grand lady-mother was unusually incensed against handsome Jay. He had refused to spend his vacation at the Castle, because, as he explained, there was a bevy of fashionable girls invited there for him to fall in love with, and whom he was expected to entertain.

"The long and the short of it is, mother, I shall not do it," he decisively declared. "I shall simply run over to Lee and take up my quarters in some unpretentious boarding-house, where I can come down to my meals and lounge about in a *négligé* shirt, and read my papers and smoke my cigars swinging in a hammock, without being disturbed by girls."

In high dudgeon his lady-mother and sister had sailed off to Europe, and they lived all their after-lives to rue it, and to bemoan the fact that they had not stayed at home to watch over the young man, and to guard the golden prize from the band of women who were on the lookout for just such an opportunity.

Jay Gardiner found just such an ideal boarding-house as he was looking for. Every woman who came to the village with a marriageable daughter tried to secure board at that boarding-house, but signally failed.

They never dreamed that the handsome, debonair young millionaire paid the good landlady an exorbitant price to keep women out.

Good Widow Smith did her duty faithfully.

When Mrs. Pendleton, of New York, heard of the great attraction at Lee, Massachusetts, she decided that that was the place where she and her two daughters, Lou and Sally, should spend the summer.

"If either of you girls come home engaged to this millionaire," Mrs. Pendleton had declared, "I shall consider it the greatest achievement of my life. True, we live in a fine mansion on Fifth Avenue, and we are supposed to be very wealthy; but not one of our dear five hundred friends has discovered that the house we live in is merely rented, nor that your father's business is mortgaged to the full extent. We will have a hard time to pull through, and keep up appearances, until you two are married off."

Mrs. Pendleton established herself at the Summerset House, with her two daughters. Every Saturday afternoon the pompous old broker went out to Lee, to make a show for the girls.

"The next question is," said Mrs. Pendleton, after the trunks were unpacked, and the pretty clothes hung up in the various closets, "which one of you two will Mr. Gardiner prefer?"

"Me!" said jolly Sally, with a mischievous laugh, complacently gazing at the lovely face reflected in the mirror.

"It might be as well to wait until after he is introduced to us before you answer that question," said Lou. "But how are we to meet him?"

"Your father will attend to that part of the business," said Mrs. Pendleton. "He understands what he has to do, and will find a way to accomplish it. Having marriageable daughters always sharpens a man's wits. Your father will find some way to get in with young Mr. Gardiner, depend upon that."

It required three weeks for Mr. Pendleton to secure an introduction to the young man. On the following day the two sisters, dressed in their best, and hanging on their father's arms, paraded up and down the village streets until they espied the object of their search. Introductions naturally followed; but, much to the chagrin of the girls, their father, after chatting for a moment with handsome Mr. Gardiner, dragged them along.

"I did not have a chance to say one word to him," said Lou, disappointedly.

"Nor I," said Sally, poutingly.

"Don't make a dead set for a man the first time you see him," recommended Mr. Pendleton, grimly. "Take matters easy."

The proudest moment of their lives was when Jay Gardiner called upon them at

their hotel one afternoon. The girls were squabbling up in their room when his card was handed them.

"Did he say which one of us he wishes to see?" cried Lou, breathlessly.

"The Misses Pendleton," replied the bell-boy.

There was a rush for their best clothes, and an exciting time for the mother in getting the girls into them.

A moment later, two girls, both pretty as pictures, with their arms lovingly twined about each other, glided into the parlor. Handsome Jay turned from the window, thinking to himself that he had never beheld a fairer picture.

There was half an hour's chat, and then he took his departure. He never knew why he did it, but he invited them both to drive with him the next day. Sally was about to answer "yes," delightedly, on the spot; but her sister, remembering her father's warning, was more diplomatic.

"We will have to ask mamma if we can go," she said.

Mrs. Pendleton, who was passing through the corridor at that moment, was called in. She and her elder daughter exchanged glances.

"I am sorry," she said, apologetically, "but Sally and I have an engagement for that afternoon."

The young millionaire fell into the trap at once.

"Then could not Miss Louise accompany me?" he inquired.

"If she cares to go, I really have no objection," said Mrs. Pendleton, hiding her delight with an arch smile.

When he left, and the two girls had returned to their room, the stormiest kind of a scene followed.

"Take care! take care!" cautioned Mrs. Pendleton, to Sally. "Your sister Lou is twenty; you are but eighteen. You should not stand in her way."

CHAPTER II.

IT IS ONE THING TO ADMIRE A PRETTY GIRL, QUITE ANOTHER THING TO FALL IN LOVE WITH HER.

The next afternoon Sally Pendleton watched behind closed blinds as her sister drove off, proud and happy as a queen, in Jay Gardiner's handsome carriage. Louise Pendleton kissed her finger-tips gracefully to the blinds, behind which she knew her rebellious sister was watching.

The drive through the country roads was delightful, it was such a fine day, so bright, so sunshiny. Jay Gardiner seemed to feel the influence of it, and almost unconsciously cast aside the mantle of haughtiness and pride, in which he usually wrapped himself, in order to make it pleasant for the beautiful, graceful girl whom fortune and fate had flung in his way.

Louise realized what a golden chance she was having, and made the best of it.

That was the beginning of the strangest romance that ever was written.

When Jay Gardiner helped his fair companion from the buggy, Louise Pendleton looked shyly into her companion's face, murmuring that she had had the most delightful drive of her life.

"I am glad you are so well pleased," answered Jay, raising his straw hat with a low bow; adding, gallantly: "I must take your sister out and show her what beautiful roads we have here."

Louise was thoroughly diplomatic. A hot flush rose to her face, but she crushed back the words that sprung to her lips, saying sweetly:

"You are indeed thoughtful, Mr. Gardiner. I am sure Sally will appreciate it."

"We will arrange it for to-morrow," he said. "I would be delighted to have you accompany us. I will drop in at the hop this evening, and you can let me know."

Louise and her mother had a long talk that afternoon.

"I think she may as well go with you," said the mother. "I am positive that he will prefer you to your sister. Fair men usually like their opposites in complexion."

The following afternoon the two sisters went driving with handsome Jay in his splendid T-cart, and were the envy of every girl in the village.

He did his best to entertain them. He drove them over to Great Barrington, and through the spacious grounds that surrounded the Castle.

The eyes of both sisters glowed as they caught sight of the magnificent, palatial house, and each resolved, in the depths of her heart, that this should be her home, and that she should reign mistress there.

Jay Gardiner divided his attentions so equally between the two sisters that neither could feel the least bit slighted.

The fortnight that followed flew by on golden wings.

There was not a day that Jay Gardiner did not take the two sisters on some sight-seeing expedition.

Every one began to wonder which of the sisters was the favorite.

Mrs. Pendleton watched affairs with the keenest interest.

"If he has a preference for either, it is certainly Louise," she told herself. "Sally seems content that it should be so."

All night long, after these afternoon excursions, both girls would seek their pillows, and dream the whole night through of handsome Jay Gardiner.

Louise would talk of him all the following morning, but Sally uttered no word; her secret was buried down in the depths of her heart.

Other young men of the village sought a pleasant word or a smile from gay, capricious Sally Pendleton. But she would have none of them.

"I will have a millionaire or nothing," she said, with a little laugh.

On two or three occasions, much to Sally's chagrin, Mr. Gardiner invited Louise to drive without her.

"That shows which way the wind is beginning to blow," she thought; and she looked at her sister critically.

Louise and her mother often had long conferences when she came in from her rambles with him.

"Has he spoken?" Mrs. Pendleton would ask; and she always received the same answer in a disappointed tone—"No!"

"Any other girl would have had a declaration from the young man before this time."

"If I could make the man propose, I would be his betrothed without a day's delay," Louise would reply, quite discontentedly.

Sally would turn away quickly before they had time to notice the expression on her face.

One day, in discussing the matter, Mr. Pendleton observed his younger daughter gazing fixedly at her mother and Louise.

"Love affairs do not interest you, Sally," he said, with a laugh. "My dear," he said, suddenly, "you are not at all like your mother in disposition. Could you ever love any one very much?"

"I do not know, papa," she answered. "I do not love many people. I only care for a few. In the way you mean, love would be a fire with me, not a sentiment."

How vividly the words came back to him afterward when her love proved a devastating fire!

She had turned suddenly to the window, and seemed to forget his question.

No one knew what a depth of passion there was in the heart of this girl. If any one should have asked her what she craved most on earth, she would have replied, on the spur of the moment—"Love!"

CHAPTER III.

THE TERRIBLE WAGER AT THE GREAT RACE.

A month had gone by since the two sisters had met the one man who was to change the whole course of their lives.

Louise Pendleton made no secret of her interest in handsome Jay Gardiner. She built no end of air-castles, all dating from the time when the young man should propose to her.

She set out deliberately to win him. Sally watched with bated breath.

There could be no love where there was such laughing, genial friendship as existed between Louise and handsome Jay. No, no! If she set about it in the right way, *she* could win him.

As for Jay himself, he preferred dark-eyed Louise to her dashing, golden-haired sister Sally.

The climax came when he asked the girls, and also their father and mother, to join a party on his tally-ho and go to the races.

Both dressed in their prettiest, and both looked like pictures.

The races at Lee were always delightful affairs. Some of the finest horses in the country were brought there to participate in these affairs.

As a usual thing, Jay Gardiner entered a number of his best horses; but on this occasion he had not done so. Louise declared that it would have made the races all the more worth seeing had some of his horses been entered.

"Don't you think so, Sally?" she said, turning to her sister, with a gay little laugh; but Sally had not even heard, she was thinking so deeply.

"She is anticipating the excitement," said Mrs. Pendleton, nodding toward Sally;

and they all looked in wonder at the unnatural flush on the girl's cheeks and the strange, dazzling brightness in her blue eyes.

They would have been startled if they could have read the thoughts that had brought them there.

There was the usual crush of vehicles, for the races at Lee always drew out a large crowd.

Jay Gardiner's box was directly opposite the judge's stand, and the group of ladies and gentlemen assembled in it was a very merry one, indeed.

Every seat in the grand stand was occupied. Both Louise and Sally were in exuberant spirits.

It was the first race which they had ever attended, and, girl-like, they were dying with curiosity to see what it would be like.

"Which horse have *you* picked for the winner?" asked Mr. Pendleton, leaning over and addressing Jay.

"Either General or Robin Adair. Both seem to stand an equal chance. Well, I declare!" exclaimed Gardiner, in the same breath, "if there isn't Queen Bess! It's laughable to see *her* entered for the race. She's very speedy, but she isn't game. I have seen her swerve when almost crowned with victory."

Sally Pendleton listened to the conversation with unusual interest.

In a few moments all the riders, booted and spurred, came hurrying out from their quarters in response to the sharp clang of a bell, and in a trice had mounted their horses, and were waiting the signal to start.

The interest of the great crowd was at its height. They were discussing their favorites freely.

The buzz of voices was deafening for a moment.

No one noticed Sally, not even Louise or her mother, as she leaned over breathlessly, and said:

"Which horse do *you* think is going to win, Mr. Gardiner?"

"I have no hesitancy in saying Robin Adair," he declared. "He has everything in his favor."

"I have an idea that the little brown horse with the white stockings will win."

He laughed, and a look indicative of superior judgment broke over his face.

"I feel very sure that your favorite, Queen Bess, will lose, Miss Sally," he said.

"I feel very confident that she will win," she said.

He shook his head.

"I should like to make a wager with you on that," she cried.

"A box of candy—anything you like," he replied, airily; "but I must warn you that it is not quite the correct thing to wager with a lady, especially when you are sure that she will lose."

"I'll take my chances," she replied, a strange look flashing into her excited blue eyes.

"You have not told me what the wager is to be."

For a moment the girl caught her breath and gave a lightning-like glance about her. No one was listening, no one would hear.

"You have not told me," said Jay Gardiner, gallantly, as he bent forward.

She turned and faced him, and her answer came in an almost inaudible whisper. But he heard it, though he believed he had not heard aright.

"Do I understand you to say that your hand is the wager?" he asked, surprisedly.

"Yes!" she answered.

For a moment he looked at her in the utmost astonishment. Then a laugh suffused his fair face. Surely this was the strangest wager that he had ever heard of. He was used to the jolly larks of girls; but surely this was the strangest of them all. He knew that there was little hope of Queen Bess winning the race. But he answered, with the utmost gravity:

"Very well; I accept your wager. Your hand shall be the prize, if the little mare wins."

"She is so very young—only eighteen," he said to himself, "that she never realized what she was saying. It was only a jolly, girlish prank."

If there had been in his mind the very slightest notion that Queen Bess would win, he should have refused to accept the wager. But she surely would not win; he was certain of that.

So, with an amused smile, he acquiesced in the strange compact. In the midst of the talking and laughing, the horses came cantering on to the course.

It was a beautiful sight, the thorough-bred horses with their coats shining like satin, except where the white foam had specked them, as they tossed their proud heads with eager impatience, the gay colors of their riders all flashing in the sunlight.

A cheer goes up from the grand stand, then the starter takes his place, and the half-dozen horses, after some little trouble, fall into something like a line. There is an instant of expectancy, then the flag drops, and away the horses fly around the circular race-track.

For a moment it is one great pell-mell rush. On, on, they fly, like giant grey-hounds from the leash, down the stretch of track, until they are but specks in the distance; then on they come, thundering past the grand stand at a maddening pace, with Robin Adair in the lead, General, Yellow Pete, and Black Daffy going like the wind at his heels, and Queen Bess—poor Queen Bess!—fully a score of yards behind.

A mad shout goes up for Robin Adair. He looks every inch the winner, with his eyes flashing, his nostrils dilated. Every man leans forward in breathless excitement. Even the ladies seem scarcely to breathe. Suddenly a horse stumbles, and the rider is thrown headlong. There is a moment's hush; but the horse is only an outsider, and the crowd cheer the rest encouragingly.

For a time they seem to run almost level, then most of the horses seem to show signs of the terrible strain. Robin Adair keeps steadily to the fore, with General closely at his heels. The rest begin to fall off.

Again a mad shout goes up for Robin Adair.

"No, no—General!" comes the hoarse cry from a hundred throats.

But through it all, the wiser ones notice the gallant little mare, Queen Bess, coming slowly to the front.

Some daring voice shouts:

"Queen Bess! Queen Bess!"

"She is fresh as a daisy!" mutters some one in the box adjoining Jay Gardiner's.

White to the lips, Sally Pendleton sits and watches, her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

The babble of voices is so deafening that she can not hear.

Again the gallant steeds are specks in the distance. Now they pass the curve, and are on the home-stretch, dashing swiftly to the finish.

Nearer and nearer sounds the thunder of their oncoming hoofs. Ten thousand people grow mad with excitement as they dash on.

To the great surprise of the spectators, Queen Bess is gaining steadily inch by inch, until she passes those before her, even the General, and there is but a ribbon of daylight between herself and the great Robin Adair.

The crowd goes wild with intense excitement. Nerves are thrilling as down the stretch dashes the racers almost with the rapidity of lightning.

The grand stand seems to rock with the excited shouts. One great cry rises from ten thousand throats. Queen Bess has reached the great Robin Adair's flanks, and inch by inch she is gaining on him. And the excited spectators fairly hold their breath to see which horse wins.

CHAPTER IV.

WHICH WON?

Never in the history of the Lee races had there been such an exciting scene as this. Jay Gardiner's face is as white as death, as, with bated breath, he watches the two thorough-breds. Every one rises to his feet in the hope of catching a full view of the flyers.

Which will win the race—the great Robin Adair or the gallant little Queen Bess?

The mad shouts are deafening.

Suddenly they notice that Robin Adair, who has been victor in a dozen such races, begins to show signs of distress. The foam covers his dark chest, and his eyes flash uneasily. It is all that his rider can do to urge him on with whip and spur.

There is only one more furlong to cover. Robin Adair and little Queen Bess are side by side, neck to neck, both increasing their speed with every stride.

Suddenly Robin, the great Robin Adair, falters ever so slightly. The seething mass of men and women hold their breath. Then, quick as a flash, as if shot from a bow, gallant little Queen Bess passes him. A great cry breaks from the vast multitude of spectators. One instant later, and the cry has deepened into a mighty yell. Little Queen Bess, with every muscle strained, passes under the wire—a winner!

The next instant she is hidden from sight by the eager thousands who are crowding and pushing one another to catch a glimpse of the winner. Jay Gardiner stands for a moment as if dumbfounded. He is hardly able to credit the evidence of his own senses.

"Queen Bess had won!" cried the golden-haired girl by his side, and he answers a hoarse—"Yes."

The girl laughs, and the sound of that laugh lingers in his memory all the long

years of his after-life.

"And I have won!" she adds, shrilly.

Again he answers, in that same hoarse monotone—"Yes!"

Before he has time even to think, Sally Pendleton turns around to her father and mother, crying triumphantly:

"Mamma—papa, Mr. Gardiner wants me to marry him. My hand is pledged to him; that is, if you are willing!"

The young man's face turned as white as it would ever be in death.

The effect of her words can better be imagined than described. Mr. Pendleton stared at his daughter as though he had not heard aright.

Mrs. Pendleton was dumbfounded. And Louise—poor Louise!—to her it seemed as if life had ended for her.

Mr. Pendleton recovered himself in an instant. He had been quite sure that Mr. Gardiner preferred his elder daughter Louise to his younger daughter, merry, rollicking Sally.

"I am sure, I am very well pleased," he said, heartily extending his hand to Mr. Gardiner. "Certainly I give my consent, in which my wife joins me."

Jay Gardiner's face flushed. He could not make a scene by refusing to accept the situation. He took the proffered hand. Mrs. Pendleton rose to the occasion.

"If he prefers Sally, that is the end of it as far as Louise is concerned. Sally had better have him than for the family to lose him and all his millions," she thought, philosophically.

Jay Gardiner's friends congratulated the supposedly happy lovers. Louise spoke no word; it seemed to her as though the whole world had suddenly changed; her golden day-dreams had suddenly and without warning been dispelled.

During that homeward ride, Jay Gardiner was unusually quiet. His brain seemed in a whirl—the strange event of the afternoon seemed like a troubled dream whose spell he could not shake off, do what he would.

He looked keenly at the girl by his side. Surely she did not realize the extent of the mischief she had done by announcing their betrothal.

It was not until he had seen his party home and found himself alone at last in his boarding-house that he gave full rein to his agitated thoughts.

It was the first time in the life of this debonair young millionaire that he had come face to face with a disagreeable problem.

Gay, jolly Sally Pendleton, with her flashing get-up—a combination of strangely unnatural canary-yellow hair, pink cheeks and lips, and floating, rainbow-hued ribbons—jarred upon his artistic tastes.

He did not admire a girl who went into convulsions of laughter, as Sally did, at everything that was said and done. In fact, he liked her less each time he saw her. But she was young—only eighteen—and she might, in time, have a little more sense, he reflected.

What should he do? He looked at the matter in every light; but, whichever way he turned, he found no comfort, no way out of the dilemma.

If he were to explain to the world that the engagement was only the outcome of a thoughtless wager, his friends would surely censure him for trying to back out; they would accuse him of acting the part of a coward. He could not endure the thought of their taking that view of it. All his friends knew his ideas concerning honor, particularly where a lady was concerned.

And now he was in honor bound to fulfill his part of the wager—marry Sally Pendleton, whom he was beginning to hate with a hatred that startled even himself.

Such a marriage would spoil his future, shipwreck his whole life, blast his every hope. But he himself was to blame. When that hoidenish, hair-brained girl had made such a daring wager, he should have declined to accept it; then this harvest of woe would not have to be reaped.

Suddenly a thought, an inspiration, came to him. He would go to Sally, point out to her the terrible mistake of this hasty betrothal, and she might release him from it.

CHAPTER V.

"SHALL WE BREAK THIS
BETROTHAL, THAT WAS MADE
ONLY IN FUN?"

The thought was like an inspiration to Jay Gardiner. He would go to Sally and ask her to break this hateful engagement; and surely she would be too proud to hold him to a betrothal from which he so ardently desired to be set free.

The following day he put his plan into execution. It was early in the afternoon when he entered the hotel, and going at once to the reception-room, he sent up his card. He had not long to wait for Miss Sally. He had scarcely taken two or three turns across the floor ere she floated into the room with both hands outstretched, an eager smile on her red lips.

He took one of the outstretched hands, bowed ever it coldly, and hastily dropped it.

"I was expecting you this afternoon," said Sally, archly, pretending not to notice his constraint, "and here you are at last."

"Miss Pendleton," he began, stiffly, "would you mind getting your hat and taking a little stroll with me? I have something to talk over with you, and I do not wish all those people on the porch, who are listening to us even now, to hear."

"I would be delighted," answered Sally. "Come on. My hat is right out there on a chair on the veranda."

He followed her in silence. It was not until they were some little distance from the hotel that he found voice to speak.

"You say you want to talk to your betrothed," laughed the girl, with a toss of her yellow curls; "but you have maintained an unbroken silence for quite a time."

"I have been wondering how to begin speaking of the subject which weighs so heavily on my mind, and I think the best way is to break right into it."

"Yes," assented Sally; "so do I."

"It is about our betrothal," he began, brusquely. "I want to ask you a plain, frank question, Miss Pendleton, and I hope you will be equally as frank with me; and that is, do you consider what you are pleased to call your betrothal to me, and which I considered at the time only a girlish prank, actually binding?"

He stopped short in the wooded path they were treading, and looked her gravely in the face—a look that forced an answer. She was equal to the occasion.

"Of course I do, Mr. Gardiner," she cried, with a jolly little laugh that sounded horrible in his ears. "And wasn't it romantic? Just like one of those stories one reads in those splendid French novels, I laughed——"

"Pray be serious, Miss Pendleton," cut in Gardiner, biting his lip fiercely to keep back an angry retort. "This is not a subject for merriment, I assure you, and I had hoped to have a sensible conversation with you concerning it—to show each of us a way out of it, if that is possible."

"I do not wish to be set free, as you phrase it, Mr. Gardiner," she answered, defiantly. "I am perfectly well pleased to have matters just as they are, I assure you."

His face paled; the one hope which had buoyed him up died suddenly in his heart.

Sally Pendleton's face flushed hotly; her eyes fell.

"I will try to win your liking," she replied.

"It is a man's place to win," he said, proudly; "women should be won," he added, with much emphasis. "When two people marry without love, they must run all the risk such a union usually incurs."

"Pardon me, but I may as well speak the truth; you are the last girl on earth whom I could love. It grieves me to wound you, but it is only just that you should know the truth. *Now* will you insist upon carrying out the contract?"

"As I have told you from the start, my answer will always be the same."

"We will walk back to the hotel," he said, stiffly.

She rose from the mossy log and accompanied him without another word. At last

he broke the silence.

"I am a gentleman," he said, "and am in honor bound to carry out this contract, if you can not be induced to release me."

"That is the only sensible view for you to take," she said.

He crushed back the angry words that rose to his lips. He had never disliked a woman before, but he could not help but own to himself that he hated the girl by his side—the girl whom fate had destined that he should marry.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WAY OF WOMEN THE WHOLE
WORLD OVER.

As Jay Gardiner and Sally walked to the hotel the young man had made up his mind that the wedding should be put off as much as possible.

Suddenly Sally touched him on the arm just as they reached the flight of steps leading to the veranda.

"I have one request to make of you," she said. "Please do not tell any of my folks that you do not care for me, and that it is not a *bonâ-fide* love-match."

He bowed coldly.

She went on: "Mamma has a relative—an old maiden cousin, ever so old—who liked my picture so well that she declared she would make me her heiress. She's worth almost as much as you are. They named me after her—Sally Rogers Pendleton. That's how I happen to have such a heathenish name. But I'll change it quick enough after the old lady dies and leaves me her money.

"And you will call to see me often?" asked Sally.

"Before I promise that, I must ask what you call 'often.'"

"You should take me out riding every afternoon, and call at least every other evening."

Again that angry look crossed Jay's handsome face.

"In this case the usual customs must be waived," he answered, haughtily. "I will call for you when I drive. That must suffice."

Jay Gardiner's thoughts were not any too pleasant as he wended his way to his boarding-house. He had always prided himself on his skill in evading women, lest a drag-net in the hands of some designing woman might insnare him. Now

he had been cleverly outwitted by an eighteen-year-old girl.

He suddenly lost all pleasure in driving. He was thankful for the rainy week that followed, as he was not obliged to take Sally out driving.

One day a telegram came from New York, requesting his immediate presence in that city to attend a critical case. With no little satisfaction he bid the Pendletons good-bye.

"We intend to cut short our summer outing. We will return to New York in a fortnight, and then I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you as often as possible," Sally remarked.

"I lead a very busy life in the city," he said. "A doctor's time is not his own."

"I shall not enjoy staying here after you have gone," she said, a trifle wistfully.

But he paid little heed to the remark.

The happiest moment of his life was when the train steamed out of Lee.

"Why don't you stay over and see the next race?" said one of his friends, wringing his hand on the platform of the car.

"I shall never go to another race," he remarked, savagely.

"What! were you a plunger at the last race?" asked his friend.

But Jay Gardiner made no answer.

"I am sorry if I have called up bitter recollections," laughed his friend.

Then the bell sounded, and the train moved on.

Jay Gardiner turned resolutely away from the window, that he might not catch a look of the hotel.

"I wonder if my patient, Miss Rogers, and the relative this girl speaks of are one and the same person?" he asked himself.

He had once saved the life of this Miss Rogers, and since that time she had been a devoted friend of his.

She was a most kind, estimable woman, and he admired her for her noble character. Surely she could not be the lady of whom Sally Pendleton spoke so

derisively?

He reached the city at last, and, without taking time to refresh himself, hurried to see who it was that needed his help.

It was eleven o'clock, and the crowds on the streets of the great metropolis had begun to thin out.

His office clerk, who was expecting him, said, in answer to his inquiry:

"It is Miss Rogers, sir. She is dangerously ill, and will have no other doctor."

"I will go to her at once," said Jay Gardiner.

But at that moment a man who had been hurt in a railway accident was brought in, and he was obliged to devote half an hour of his valuable time in dressing his wounds. Then with all possible haste he set out on his journey.

He gave orders to his driver to go to Miss Rogers' residence by the shortest route possible.

At that very moment, in another part of the city, a woman who had once been young and beautiful lay dying. The room in which she lay was magnificent in its costly hangings; the lace draperies that hung from the windows represented a fortune, the carpets and rugs which covered the floor were of the costliest description. Rare paintings and the richest of bric-a-brac occupied the walls and other available places. Even the lace counterpane on the bed represented the expenditure of a vast sum of money. But the woman who lay moaning there in mortal pain would have given all to have purchased one hour of ease.

"Has the doctor come yet, Mary?" she asked.

"No," replied her faithful attendant, who bent over her. "But he can not be long now, my lady. It is several hours since we telegraphed for him, and I have telephoned for him every hour since. At the office they say that he has already started for here."

"Are those carriage wheels? Go to the window, Mary, and see."

The attendant glided noiselessly to the heavily draped window and drew aside the hangings.

"No," she answered, gently; "he has not yet come."

"Something must have happened, Mary," half-sobbed the sufferer; "I am sure of it."

Ay, something out of the usual had happened to Doctor Gardiner.

As his handsome brougham turned into Canal Street, the doctor, in looking from the window, noticed a young girl hurrying along the street.

There was something about the symmetrical figure that caused the doctor to look a second time.

He said to himself that she must be young; and a feeling of pity thrilled his heart to see one so young threading the streets at that hour of the night.

So many people were making their way through the streets that the driver was only able to proceed slowly. And thus the young girl, who had quite unconsciously attracted the doctor's attention, kept pace with the vehicle.

Once, as Jay Gardiner caught sight of her face, he felt as though an electric shock had suddenly passed through him. For a moment he was almost spell-bound. Where had he seen that face? Then suddenly it occurred to him that it was the *fac-simile* of the picture he had bought abroad.

And as he gazed with spell-bound attention, much to his disgust he saw the young woman stop in front of a wine-room and peer in at one of the windows. This action disgusted the young doctor immeasurably.

"How sad that one so fair as she should have gone wrong in the morning of life," he thought.

Suddenly she turned and attempted to dart across the street. But in that moment her foot slipped, and she was precipitated directly under the horses' hoofs.

A cry broke from the lips of the doctor, and was echoed by the man on the box.

"Are you hurt?" cried Doctor Gardiner, springing from his seat and bending over the prostrate figure of the girl.

"No, no!" cried the girl, in the saddest, sweetest voice he had ever heard. "They must not find me here when they come to the door; they will be so angry!" she said, springing to her feet.

At that moment there was a commotion in the wine-room, the door of which had

just been opened.

As the girl turned to look in that direction, she saw a man pushed violently into the street.

"Oh, it is father—it is father!" cried the young girl, wildly, shaking herself free from the doctor's detaining hand. "Oh, they have killed my father! See! he is lying on the pavement dead, motionless! Oh, God, pity me! I am left alone in the wide, wide world!"

CHAPTER VII.

BERNARDINE.

Doctor Gardiner sprung forward quickly.

"You are unnecessarily alarmed, my dear young lady," he said. "The gentleman is only stunned."

So it proved to be; for he had scarcely ceased speaking when the man struggled to his feet and looked about him in dazed bewilderment.

"Oh, papa, darling, have they killed you!" sobbed the young girl, springing wildly forward and throwing her arms about the dust-begrimed man.

"I don't know, Bernardine," he answered in a shrill voice. "I am sure every bone in my body is broken—quite sure."

"No," interrupted Doctor Gardiner, pitying the young girl in her distress; "you are only bruised. I am a doctor; if you will give me your address, I will look in and give you something when I return this way. I may return in an hour's time, I may be as late as to-morrow morning."

"We—we—could not pay for the services of a doctor, sir," sobbed the young girl. "If there is anything the matter, I will have to take poor papa to the hospital."

"I would never go to the hospital, Bernardine," whined the man in a low tone. "That will be the last of me if I ever have to go there."

"I would make no charge whatever," said Doctor Gardiner. "My services would be rendered gratis," he added, earnestly.

The young girl looked at him with tears shining in her great dark eyes.

"We live in the tenement just around the corner, sir," she said, "on the sixth floor. My father is David Moore, the basket-maker."

Doctor Gardiner dared not remain another moment talking with them, and with a hasty bow he re-entered his carriage. But during the remainder of his journey he could think of nothing but the sad, beautiful face of Bernardine Moore, the basket-maker's daughter.

"What in the name of Heaven has come over me!" he muttered. "I have seen a face, and it seems as though I have stepped through the gates of the old world and entered a new one."

He collected his thoughts with a start, as the carriage reached its destination.

He had not realized how quickly the time had passed. He resolutely put all thoughts from him as he walked up the steps of the mansion before which he found himself.

The door opened before he could touch the bell.

"We have been waiting for you, doctor," said the low-voiced attendant who had come to the door.

He followed her through the magnificent hall-way, and up the polished stairs to the apartment above, where he knew his patient was awaiting him.

The wan face lying against the pillow lighted up as the doctor entered. His bright, breezy presence was as good as medicine.

"You!" he cried, advancing to the couch. "Why, this will never do, Miss Rogers! Tut, tut! you are not sick, you do not look it! This is only an excuse to send for me, and you know it. I can see at a glance that you are a long way from being ill, and you know it!" he repeated.

He said it in so hearty a manner and in such apparent good faith, that his words could not help but carry conviction with them.

Already the poor lady began to feel that she was not nearly so ill as she had believed herself to be.

But the doctor, bending over her, despite his reassuring smile and light badinage, realized with alarm that his patient was in great danger, that there was but a fighting chance for her life.

An hour or more he worked over her unceasingly, doing everything that skill and science could suggest.

With the dawning of the morning he would know whether she would live or die.

"Doctor," she said, looking up into his face, "do you think my illness is fatal? Is this my last call?"

He scarcely knew how to answer her. He felt that the truth should not be kept from her. But how was he to tell her?

"Because," she went on, before he could answer, "if it is, I had better know it in time, in order to settle up my affairs. I—I have always dreaded making a will; but—but there will come a time, sooner or later, when it will be necessary for me to do so."

Again Doctor Gardiner laughed out that hearty, reassuring laugh.

"That is the natural feeling of a woman," he said. "Men never have that feeling. With them it is but an ordinary matter, as it should be."

"Would you advise me to make a will, doctor?" and the white face was turned wistfully to him.

"Certainly," he replied, with an attempt at light-heartedness. "It will occupy your mind, give you something to think about, and take your thoughts from your fancied aches and pains."

"Fancied?" replied the poor lady. "Ah, doctor, they are real enough, although you do not seem to think so. I—I want to leave all my money to *you*, doctor," she whispered. "You are the only person in the whole wide world who, without an object, has been kind to me," she added, with sudden energy. The fair, handsome face of the young doctor grew grave.

"Nay, nay," he said, gently. "While I thank you with all my heart for the favor you would bestow on me, still I must tell you that I could not take the money. No, no, my dear Miss Rogers; it must go to the next of kin, if you have any."

Her face darkened as an almost forgotten memory rose up before her.

"No!" she said, sharply; "anything but that! They never cared for me! They shall not fight over what I have when I am dead!"

"But you have relatives?" he questioned, anxiously.

"Yes," she said; "one or two distant cousins, who married and who have families

of their own. One of them wrote me often while I lived at San Francisco; but in her letters she always wanted something, and such hints were very distasteful to me. She said that she had named one of her children after me, saying in the next sentence that I ought to make the girl my heiress. I wrote to her to come on to San Francisco, when I fell so ill, a few weeks ago. She answered me that she could not come, that she was very sick herself, and that the doctors had ordered her out to Lee, Massachusetts, to live on a farm, until she should become stronger. When I grew stronger, I left San Francisco with my faithful attendant, Mary. I did not let them know that I was in New York, and had taken possession of this fine house, which I own. Suddenly I fell ill again. I intended to wait until I grew stronger to hunt her up, and see how I should like her before making overtures of friendship to her. I should not like to make a will and leave all to these people whom I do not know. There are hundreds of homes for old and aged women that need the money more."

"Still, a will should always be made," said the doctor, earnestly. "I will send for some one at once, if you will entertain the idea of attending to it."

"No!" she replied, firmly. "If anything happens to me, I will let them take their chances. Don't say anything more about it, doctor; my mind is fully made up."

He dared not argue with a woman who was so near her end as he believed her to be.

This case proved to be one of the greatest achievements of his life. From the very Valley of the Shadow of Death he drew back the struggling, fluttering spirit of the helpless lady. And when the first gray streaks of dawn flushed the eastern sky, the doctor drew a great sigh of relief.

"Thank God, she will live!" he said.

When the sun rose later the danger was past—the battle of life had been won, and death vanquished.

Although Doctor Gardiner was very weary after his night's vigil, still he left the house with a happy heart beating in his bosom.

He scarcely felt the fatigue of his arduous labors as he stepped into his carriage again. His heart gave a strange throb as he ordered the driver to go to the tenement house, the home of the old basket-maker and his beautiful daughter.

How strange it was that the very thought of this fair girl seemed to give his tired

brain rest for a moment!

He soon found himself at the street and number he wanted.

"Does Mr. Moore, the basket-maker, live here?" he asked, pausing for a moment to inquire of a woman who sat on the doorstep with a little child in her arms.

"Yes," she answered, in a surly voice; "and more's the pity for the rest of us tenants, for he is a regular fiend incarnate, sir, and has a fit of the delirium tremens as regularly as the month comes round. He's got 'em now. A fine dance he leads that poor daughter of his. Any other girl would get out and leave him. Are you the doctor Miss Bernardine was expecting? If so, walk right up. She is waiting for you."

CHAPTER VIII.

"OH, I AM SO GLAD THAT YOU HAVE COME, DOCTOR!"

Doctor Jay Gardiner, with as much speed as possible, made his way up the long, steep flights of dark, narrow stairs, and through the still darker passages, which were only lighted by the open doors here and there, revealing rooms inhabited by half a dozen persons. They were all talking, fighting or scrambling at the same time; and the odor of that never-to-be-forgotten smell of frying onions and sausages greeted his nostrils at every turn until it seemed to him that he must faint.

"Great heavens! how can so fair a young girl live in an atmosphere like this?" he asked himself.

At length, almost exhausted, for he was unused to climbing, this haughty, aristocratic young doctor found himself on the sixth floor of the tenement house, and he knocked at the first door he came to.

It was opened by the young girl Bernardine. He could see at a glance that her face bore the traces of trouble, and the dark eyes, still heavy with unshed tears, showed signs of recent weeping.

"Oh, I am so glad that you have come, doctor!" she said, clasping her little hands. "My poor father is so much worse. Please step in this way!"

He was ushered into a little sitting-room, and as he entered it he saw that everything was scrupulously neat and clean.

"Poor papa is out of his mind, doctor. Please come quickly, and see him!"

It did not require a second glance for the doctor to understand all; and straightway he proceeded to give the man a draught, which had the effect of quieting him. The young girl stood by the man with clasped hands and dilated eyes, scarcely breathing as she watched him.

The young doctor turned impulsively to the girl by his side.

"Pardon me for the question, but do you live alone with your father?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied in a voice that thrilled him as the grandest, sweetest music he had heard had never had power to do. "We have only each other," she added, watching the distorted face on the pillow with a fond wistfulness that made the young doctor, who was watching her, almost envy the father.

"I will come again to-morrow," he said, "and prescribe for him. I have done all the good that is possible for the present."

"Good-morning, Miss Moore," he said, standing with his hat in his hand, and bowing before her as if she were a princess. "If you should have occasion to need me in a hurry, send for me at once. This is my address." And he handed her his card.

Again she thanked him in a voice so sweet and low that it sounded to him like softest music.

He closed the door gently after him; and it seemed to him, as he walked slowly down the narrow dark stairs, that he had left Paradise and one of God's angels in it.

CHAPTER IX.

"WHAT A LONELY LIFE FOR THIS BEAUTIFUL YOUNG GIRL!"

All that day the sweet face of Bernardine Moore was before Doctor Gardiner. He found himself actually looking forward to the morrow, when he should see her again. He deceived himself completely as to the cause, telling himself that it was because of his pity for her, and the desolate life she was leading.

The next day when he called, Bernardine again met him at the door.

"Papa has been calling for you," she said. Then she stopped short, in dire confusion, as she remembered the reason why he was so anxious to see him. "He has just fallen into a light sleep. I will go and awaken him at once and tell him you are here."

"By no means," he said. "Pray do not awaken him; the sleep he is having is better than medicine. Will you permit me to sit down and talk with you for a few moments, until he awakens?"

She looked anxiously at him for a moment, then said, with charming frankness:

"Would you mind very much if I went on with my work. I have several baskets to be finished by night, when they will be called for."

"By no means. Pray proceed with your work. Do not let me disturb you," he answered, hastily. "I shall consider it a great favor if you will allow me to watch you as you work."

"Certainly," said Bernardine, "if you will not mind coming into our little work-shop," and she led the way with a grace that completely charmed him.

The place was devoid of any furniture save two or three wooden chairs, which the girl and her father occupied at their work, the long wooden bench, the great coils of willow—the usual paraphernalia of the basket-makers' trade.

She sat down on her little wooden seat, indicating a seat opposite for him. He watched her eagerly as her slim white fingers flew in and out among the strands of trailing willow quickly taking shape beneath her magic touch.

"It must be a very lonely life for you," said Jay Gardiner, after a moment's pause.

"I do not mind; I am never lonely when father is well," she answered, with a sweet, bright smile. "We are great companions, father and I. He regales me by the hour with wonderful stories of things he used to see when he was a steamboat captain. But he met with an accident one time, and then he had to turn to basket-making."

As he conversed with the young girl, Jay Gardiner was indeed surprised to see what a fund of knowledge that youthful mind contained. She was the first young girl whom he had met who could sit down and talk sensibly to a man. Her ideas were so sweet, so natural, that it charmed him in spite of himself. She was like a heroine out of a story-book—just such a one, he thought, as Martha Washington must have been in her girlhood days. His admiration and respect for her grew with each moment.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT IS LIFE WITHOUT LOVE?

Every evening, on some pretext or other, Jay Gardiner managed to pay David Moore, the basket-maker, a visit, and the cynical old man began to look forward to these visits.

He never dreamed that his daughter was the magnet which drew the young man to his poor home. They were evenings that Jay Gardiner never forgot.

Bernardine was slightly confused at first by his presence; then she began to view the matter in another light—that the young doctor had taken quite an interest in her father. He had certainly cured him of a terrible habit, and she was only too pleased that her father should have visits from so pleasant a man.

She always had some work in her slender white hands when the doctor called. Sometimes, glancing up unexpectedly, she would find the doctor's keen blue eyes regarding her intently, and she would bend lower over her sewing. Jay Gardiner, however, saw the flush that rose to her cheek and brow.

As he sat in that little tenement sitting-room—he who had been flattered and courted by the most beautiful heiresses—he experienced a feeling of rest come over him.

He would rather pass one hour in that plain, unpretentious sitting-room than visit the grandest Fifth Avenue mansion.

And thus a fortnight passed. At the end of that time, Jay Gardiner stood face to face with the knowledge of his own secret—that he had at last met in Bernardine Moore the idol of his life. He stood face to face with this one fact—that wealth, grandeur, anything that earth could give him, was of little value unless he had the love of sweet Bernardine.

It came upon him suddenly that the sweet witchery, the glamor falling over him was—love.

He realized that he lived only in Bernardine's presence, and that without her life would be but a blank to him. His love for Bernardine became the one great passion of his life. Compared with her, all other women paled into insignificance.

He fell, without knowing it, from a state of intense admiration into one of blind adoration for her. He had never before trembled at a woman's touch. Now, if his hand touched hers, he trembled as a strong tree trembles in a storm.

Looking forward to the years to come, he saw no gleam of brightness in them unless they were spent with the girl he loved.

Then came the awakening. He received a letter from Sally Pendleton, in which she upbraided him for not writing. That letter reminded him that he was not free; that before he had met Bernardine, he had bound himself in honor to another.

He was perplexed, agitated. He loved Bernardine with his whole heart, and yet, upon another girl's hand shone his betrothal-ring.

When the knowledge of his love for sweet Bernardine came to him, he told himself that he ought to fly from her; go where the witchery of her face, the charm of her presence, would never set his heart on fire; go where he could never hear her sweet voice again.

"Only a few days more," he said, sadly. "I will come here for another week, and then the darkness of death will begin for me, for the girl who holds me in such galling chains will return to the city."

Why should he not see Bernardine for another week? It would not harm her, and it would be his last gleam of happiness.

At this time another suitor for Bernardine's hand appeared upon the scene. On one of his visits to the Moores' home he met a young man there. The old basket-maker introduced him, with quite a flourish, as Mr. Jasper Wilde, a wine merchant, and his landlord. The two men bowed stiffly and looked at each other as they acknowledged the presentation.

Doctor Gardiner saw before him a heavy-set, dark-eyed young man with a low, sinister brow. An unpleasant leer curled his thin lips, which a black mustache partially shaded, and he wore a profusion of jewels which was disgusting to one of his refined temperament.

He could well understand that he was a wine merchant's son. He certainly gave evidence of his business, and that he had more money than good breeding. The word *roué* was stamped on his every feature.

Jay Gardiner was troubled at the very thought of such a man being brought in contact with sweet Bernardine. Then the thought flashed through his mind that this was certainly the man whom the woman on the doorstep had told him about.

Jasper Wilde, looking at the young doctor, summed him up as a proud, white-handed, would-be doctor who hadn't a cent in his pocket.

"I can see what the attraction is here—it's Bernardine; but I'll block his little game," he muttered. "The few weeks that I've been out of the city he has been making great headway; but I'll stop that."

The young doctor noticed that what the woman had told him was quite true. He could readily see that Bernardine showed a feeling of repugnance toward her visitor.

But another thing he noticed with much anxiety was, that the old basket-maker was quite hilarious, as though he had been dosed with wine or something stronger.

Jay Gardiner knew at once that this man must have known the basket-maker's failing and slipped him a bottle, and that that was his passport to favor.

Doctor Gardiner talked with David Moore and his daughter, addressing no remarks whatever to the obnoxious visitor.

"The impudent popinjay is trying to phase me," thought Wilde; "but he will see that it won't work."

Accordingly he broke into every topic that was introduced; and thus the evening wore on, until it became quite evident to Doctor Gardiner that Mr. Jasper Wilde intended to sit him out.

Bernardine looked just a trifle weary when the clock on the mantel struck ten, and Doctor Gardiner rose to depart.

"Shall I hold the light for you?" she asked. "The stair-way is always very dark."

"If you will be so kind," murmured the doctor.

Jasper Wilde's face darkened as he listened to this conversation. His eyes flashed fire as they both disappeared through the door-way.

On the landing outside Doctor Gardiner paused a few moments.

How he longed to give her a few words of advice, to tell her to beware of the man whom he had just left talking to her father! But he remembered that he had not that right. She might think him presumptuous.

If he had only been free, he would have pleaded his own suit then and there. That she was poor and unknown, and the daughter of such a father, he cared nothing.

Ah! cruel fate, which forbid him taking her in his arms and never letting her go until she had promised to be his wife!

As it was, knowing that he loved her with such a mighty love, he told himself that he must look upon her face but once again, and then it must be only to say farewell.

"The night is damp and the air is chill, and these narrow halls are draughty. Do not stand out here," he said, with eager solicitude; "you might catch cold."

She laughed a sweet, amused laugh.

"I am used to all kinds of weather, Doctor Gardiner," she said. "I am always out in it. I make the first track in winter through the deep snows. I go for the work in the morning, and return with it at night. You know, when one is poor, one can not be particular about such little things as the weather; it would never do."

CHAPTER XI.

A SHADOW DARKENS THE PEACEFUL HOME OF THE BASKET-MAKER.

Sweet Bernardine Moore laughed to see the look of amazement upon the young doctor's face.

He who had been reared in luxury, pampered and indulged—ay, spoiled by an over-indulgent mother, what had he ever known of the bitter realities of life, the struggles many have to undergo for their very existence?

He looked at this delicate, graceful girl, and his lips trembled, his eyes grew moist with tears.

Oh, if he but dared remove her from all this sorrow! The thought of her toiling and suffering there was more than he could calmly endure.

He turned away quickly. In another moment he would have committed himself. He had almost forgotten that he was bound to another, and would have been kneeling at her feet in another minute but for the sound of her father's voice, which brought him to himself.

"Bernardine!" cried her father, fretfully, "what are you doing out there so long in the hall? Don't you know that Mr. Wilde is waiting here to talk with you?"

A pitiful shadow crossed the girl's face. Evidently she knew what the man had to say to her.

Tears which she could not resist came to her eyes, and her lovely lips trembled.

Doctor Gardiner could not help but observe this.

"Bernardine," he cried, hoarsely, forgetting himself for the moment, "I should like to ask something of you. Will you promise to grant my request?"

"Yes," she murmured, faintly and unhesitatingly.

"Do not trust the man to whom your father is talking."

"There is little need to caution me in regard to him, Doctor Gardiner," she murmured. "My own heart has told me that already——"

She stopped short in great embarrassment, and Doctor Gardiner thought it best not to pursue the subject further, for his own peace of mind as well as hers.

He turned abruptly away, and was quickly lost to sight in the labyrinth of stairways.

With slow steps Bernardine had re-entered her apartments again. As she approached the door, she heard Jasper Wilde say to her father in an angry, excited voice:

"There is no use in talking to you any longer; it must be settled to-night. I do not intend to wait any longer."

"But it is so late!" whined the basket-maker in his high, sharp treble.

"You knew I was coming, and just what I was coming here for. Why didn't you get rid of the poor, penny doctor, instead of encouraging him?"

"I could not say much to the doctor, for he had my life in his hands, and saved it."

"There might be worse things for you to face," replied the man, menacingly. And the poor old basket-maker understood but too well what he meant.

"Yes, yes," he said, huskily, "you must certainly speak to Bernardine this very night, if I can get her to give you a hearing. I will do my best to influence her to have you."

"Influence!" exclaimed the man, savagely. "You must command her!"

"Bernardine is not a girl one can command," sighed the old man. "She likes her own way, you know."

"It isn't for her to say what she wants or doesn't want!" exclaimed the man savagely. "I shall look to you to bring the girl round to your way of thinking, without any nonsense. Do you hear and comprehend?"

"Yes," said the old man, wearily. "But that isn't making Bernardine understand. Some young girls are very willful!"

Trembling with apprehension, the old basket-maker dropped into the nearest chair.

His haggard face had grown terribly pale, and his emaciated hands shook, while his eyes fairly bulged from their sockets. The agony of mind he was undergoing was intense.

"Will Bernardine refuse this man?" he muttered to himself, "Oh, if I but dared tell her all, would she pity, or would she blame me?"

He loved the girl after his own fashion; but to save himself he was willing to sacrifice her. Poor Bernadine! Had she but known all!

CHAPTER XII.

"YOU ARE FALSE AS YOU ARE
FAIR, BERNARDINE!"

"I should think your own common sense would tell you. Surely you must have guessed what I am so eager to say, Miss Bernardine?" Jasper Wilde began, taking little heed of her father.

The girl's white lips opened, but no sound came from them. He was right; she quite expected it; but she did not tell him so.

"I might as well break right into the subject at once," he said. "My errand can be told in a few words. I have fallen deeply in love with your pretty face, and I am here to ask you to marry me. Mind, I say to marry me! What do you think of it?"

The girl drew back hurriedly.

"I think you might have guessed what my answer would have been, and thus saved yourself."

Again his face darkened, and an angry fire leaped into his eyes; but he controlled himself by a great effort.

"Why do you refuse me?" he asked. "I am a big catch, especially for a girl like you. Come, I have taken a notion to you, Bernardine, and that's saying a good deal."

"Spare yourself the trouble of uttering another word, Mr. Wilde," she said, with dignity. "I would not, I could not marry you under any circumstances. It is as well for you to know that."

"So you think now; but I fancy we can change all that; can't we, Moore?"

The old basket-maker's lips moved, but no sound came from them; the terror in his eyes became more apparent with each moment.

"I will never change my decision," said Bernardine.

Jasper Wilde drew his chair up nearer to the girl.

"Listen to me, Bernardine," he said. "You shall marry me, by all the gods above and all the demons below! I have never been thwarted in any wish or desire of my life. I shall not be thwarted in this!"

"You would not wish me to marry you against my will?" said the girl.

"That would make little difference to me," he rejoined. "You will like me well enough after you marry me; so never fear about that."

"I do not propose to marry you," replied Bernardine, rising haughtily from her seat. "While I thank you for the honor you have paid me, I repeat that I could never marry you."

"And I say that you shall, girl, and that, too, within a month from to-day," cried the other, in a rage.

"Oh, Bernardine, say 'Yes!'" cried the old man, trembling like an aspen leaf.

"I have never gone contrary to your wishes, father, in all my life," she said; "but in this instance, where my interests are so deeply concerned, I do feel that I must decide for myself."

With a horrible laugh, Jasper Wilde quitted the room, banging the door after him.

With a lingering look at the beautiful young face, her father bid her good-night, and with faltering steps quitted the little sitting-room and sought his own apartment. A little later, Bernardine was startled to hear him moaning and sobbing as though he were in great pain.

"Are you ill, father?—can I do anything for you?" she called, going quickly to his door and knocking gently.

"No," he answered in a smothered voice. "Go to your bed, Bernardine, and sleep. It is a great thing to be able to sleep—and forget."

"Poor papa!" sighed the girl, "how I pity him! Life has been very hard to him. Why are some men born to be gentlemen, with untold wealth at their command, while others are born to toil all their weary lives through for the meager pittance that suffices to keep body and soul together?"

She went slowly to her little room, but not to sleep. She crossed over to the window, sat down on a chair beside it, and looked up at the bit of starry sky that was visible between the tall house-tops and still taller chimneys, then down at the narrow deserted street so far below, and gave herself up to meditation.

"No, no; I could never marry Jasper Wilde!" she mused. "The very thought of it makes me grow faint and sick at heart; his very presence fills me with an indescribable loathing which I can not shake off. How differently the presence of Doctor Gardiner affects me! I—I find myself watching for his coming, and dreading the time when he will cease to visit papa."

Doctor Gardiner's coming had been to Bernardine as the sun to the violet. The old life had fallen from her, and she was beginning to live a new one in his presence.

As she sat by the window, she thought of the look the young doctor had given her at parting. The remembrance of it quickened the beating of her heart, and brought the color to her usually pale cheeks.

How different the young doctor was from Jasper Wilde! If the young doctor had asked her the same question Jasper Wilde had, would her answer have been the same?

The clock in an adjacent belfry slowly tolled the midnight hour. Bernardine started.

"How quickly the time has flown since I have been sitting here," she thought.

She did not know that it had been because her thoughts had been so pleasant. She heard a long-drawn sigh come from the direction of her father's room.

"Poor papa!" she mused; "I think I can guess what is troubling him so. He has spent the money we have saved for the rent, and fears to tell me of it. If it be so, Jasper Wilde, at the worst can but dispossess us, and we can find rooms elsewhere, and pay him as soon as we earn it. How I feel like making a confidant of Doctor Gardiner!"

Poor girl! If she had only done so, how much sorrow might have been spared her!

CHAPTER XIII.

HE WISHED HE COULD TELL
SOME ONE HIS UNFORTUNATE
LOVE STORY.

During the weeks Doctor Gardiner had been visiting the old basket-maker and thinking so much of his daughter, he had by no means neglected his patient, Miss Rogers, in whom he took an especial, almost brotherly, interest, and who rapidly recovered under his constant care, until at length he laughingly pronounced her "quite as good as new."

One day, in mounting the handsome brown-stone steps to make more of a social than a business call, he was surprised to see the mansion closed.

He felt quite grieved that his friend should have packed up and departed so hastily—that she had not even remembered to say good-bye to him. He felt all the more sorry for her absence just at this time, for, after much deliberation, he had decided to make a confidante of Miss Rogers, and pour into her kindly, sympathetic ear the whole of his unfortunate love story from beginning to end, and ask her advice as to what course he should pursue. He had also resolved to show her the last letter he had received from Miss Pendleton, in which she hinted rather strongly that the marriage ought to take place as soon as she returned to the city.

And now Miss Rogers was gone, he felt a strange chill, a disappointment he could hardly control, as he turned away and walked slowly down the steps and re-entered his carriage.

The next mail, however, brought him a short note from Miss Rogers. He smiled as he read it, and laid it aside, little dreaming of what vital importance those few carelessly-written lines would be in the dark days ahead of him. It read as follows:

"MY DEAR DOCTOR GARDINER—You will probably be surprised to learn that by the time this reaches you I shall be far away from New York, on a little secret

mission which has been a pet notion of mine ever since I began to recover from my last illness. Do not be much surprised at any very eccentric scheme you may hear of me undertaking.

"Yours hastily and faithfully,
"MISS ROGERS."

The terse letter was characteristic of the writer. Doctor Gardiner replaced it in its envelope, put it away in his desk, with the wish that she had mentioned her destination, then dismissed it from his mind.

At the identical moment Doctor Gardiner was reading Miss Rogers' letter, quite a pitiful scene was being enacted in the home of the old basket-maker.

It was with a shudder that he awoke and found the sunshine which heralded another day stealing into his narrow little room.

Bernardine had been stirring about for some time, and at length the savory odor of the frugal breakfast she was preparing reached him, and at that moment she called him.

When he made his appearance she saw at a glance that he must have passed a sleepless night. He had no appetite, and pushed away the plate with his food untouched, despite Bernardine's earnest efforts to induce him to eat something.

He watched her deft fingers in silence as she cleared the table at length, washed and dried the dishes and put them away, and tidied the little room.

"Now, father," she said, at length, "the sun is shining now, and I will give you half an hour of my time to listen to the story you have to tell me. Don't look so distressed about it, dear; no matter what it is, I will utter no word of complaint, you shall hear no bitter words from my lips, only words of love, trust and comfort."

"Tell me that again, Bernardine," he cried; "say it over again. Those words are like the dew of Heaven to my feverish soul."

She uttered the words again, with her soft white arms twined lovingly around his neck, and she held them there until he came to the end of his wretched story.

"Bernardine," he began, softly, with a pitiful huskiness in his voice, "I rely on your promise. You have given me your word, and I know you will never break it.

Don't look at me. Let me turn my face away from the sight of the horror in your eyes as you listen. There, that is right; let my poor whirling head rest on your strong young shoulder.

"It happened only a few weeks ago, Bernardine," he continued, brokenly, "this tragedy which has wrecked my life. One night—ah! how well I remember it—even while I lie dying, it will stand out dark and horrible from the rest of my life—I—I could not withstand the craving for drink which took possession of me, and after you slept, I stole softly from my couch and out of the house.

"The few dimes I had in my pocket soon went where so many dollars of my—yes, even your humble earnings have gone before—in the coffers of the rum-shop.

"The liquor I drank seemed to fire my brain as it had never been fired before. I remember that I went to that place around the corner—the place that you and Doctor Gardiner saw them throw me out of that night you thought they had crippled me for life.

"The man who keeps the place saw me coming in, and made a dash at me. Then a terrible fight took place between us, and a crowd gathered, foremost among whom I dimly saw the face of Jasper Wilde outlined amidst the jeering throng.

"To hasten the telling of an unpleasant tale, I will say he ejected me, the while hurling the most insulting epithets at me. Then he spoke of *you*, Bernardine, and—and turning upon him with the ferocity of an enraged lion, I swore that I would kill him on sight.

"'Beware! take care,' laughed Jasper Wilde, turning to my enemy; 'the old basket-maker always keeps his word. You are in danger, my boy.'

"At this the crowd jeered. I hurried away. I never remembered how far I walked to still the throbbing of my heart and cool the fever in my veins.

"At length I turned my steps toward home. How far I had traversed in the darkness I did not take note of; but as I was hurrying along, I heard a loud cry for help. I ran around the corner from which it seemed to proceed, and then I fell headlong across the body of a man lying prone upon the pavement.

"I drew a box of matches from my pocket, and hastily struck one. Yes, it was a man dying with a wound in his breast, made from a clasp-knife, which still stuck in it.

"In horror I snatched the knife away; and as I did so, the blood from the wound spurted up into my face and covered my clothes. In that instant I made the awful discovery that the knife was my own. I must have lost it from my pocket during my encounter with my enemy, who kept the wine-room.

"By the flickering light of the half-burned match, which I held down to the man's face, I saw—oh, God! how shall I tell it?—I saw that the man who had been murdered with my knife was the man whom I had sworn before the crowd I would kill on sight.

"As I made this startling discovery, a man laid a heavy hand on my shoulder, and Jasper Wilde's voice, with a demoniac ring, cried in my horrified ears:

"'I see you have kept your word, David Moore! You have murdered your enemy!'

"All in vain I protested my innocence. He only laughed at me, jeered at my agony with diabolical glee.

"'You will be hanged,' he said. 'Of course, you realize that, David Moore.'

"'I would not care for my life—what became of me—if it were not for Bernardine!' I moaned, wildly.

"'Yes, it *is* a pity for Bernardine,' he made answer. 'I am sorry for you on her account. How sad it will be to see you torn away from her, and she all alone in the world! Moore,' he hissed, close to my ear, 'for her sake, and upon one condition, I will save you from the gallows. No one but me has seen you bending over the murdered man with that knife in your hand. If I keep silent, no one can *prove* the crime was done by you. Do you comprehend—do you realize of what vital interest that which I am saying is to you?'

"'Yes,' I answered in a choked, awful voice. 'But the condition! What have I, a poor, penniless basket-maker, even at this moment owing you money—what have I which you, the son of a rich father, would stoop to accept?' I cried in the utmost despair. He stooped nearer, and whispered in my ear:

"'You have a treasure which I long to possess. Give me Bernardine. I—I will marry the girl, and will forever hold my peace. It will save you from prison. Think and act quickly, man. You can *make* the girl accept me if she should desire to refuse.'

"I heard the whistle of an advancing policeman coming leisurely along his beat.

Another moment and he would turn the corner where I stood almost paralyzed.

"'Speak, man!' cried Jasper Wilde. 'Am I to save you, or call the officer to arrest you? Am I to get Bernardine, or not?'

"Oh, child! forgive me—pity me! Life to an old man even like me is sweet. I could almost feel the rope of the gallows tightening about my poor old throat, and I—oh, God, pity me—I promised him, Bernardine.

"'Save me, and Bernardine shall marry you!' I cried; 'only save me! Don't call the police, for the love of Heaven!'

"'Then fly!' he cried, shrilly. 'Take the knife with you; go as quickly as you can to my rooms, back of my place, and there I will give you something to wear until you can get home!'

"I made my way to his place, as he directed. He was there before me. He took the blood-stained clothes and knife from me, remarking, grimly:

"'I shall keep these, the evidences of your guilt, until you succeed in making Bernardine my wife. If she refuses, I shall need them.'

"Oh, Bernardine, from that hour to this I have lived a perfect hell on earth. I am as innocent of that crime as a babe; but everything is against me. Jasper Wilde has proof enough to send your poor, wretched old father to the gallows, if you refuse to marry him. Oh, Bernardine! I dare not lift my head and look up into your dear young face. Speak to me, child, and let me know the worst. This gnawing at my soul is intolerable—I can not bear it and live!"

But the lips of the hapless girl whose arms were twined about his neck were mute and cold as marble.

"Won't you speak to me, Bernardine?" he wailed out, sharply. "Your silence is more than I can bear. For God's sake, speak!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"HAVE I BROKEN YOUR HEART, MY DARLING?"

Bernardine Moore slowly untwined her white arms from about her father's neck, and turned her white, anguished face toward him, and the awful despair that lay in the dark eyes that met his was more piteous than any words could have been.

"Have I broken your heart, Bernardine?" he cried out. "Oh, my child, my beautiful Bernardine, have I ruined your life by that fatal promise?"

She tried to speak, but no words fell from her white lips; it seemed to her that she would never speak again; that the power of speech had suddenly left her.

"My poor old life is not worth such a sacrifice, Bernardine!" he cried out, sharply; "and you shall not make it. I will put a drop of something I know of in a cup of coffee, and then it will be all over with me. He can not pursue me through the dark gates of death."

"No, no," said the girl, great, heavy tears—a blessed relief—falling from her eyes like rain. "Your life is more precious to me than all the world beside. I would take your place on the gallows and die for you, father. Oh, believe me!—believe me!"

"And you feel in your heart the truth of what I say—that I am innocent, Bernardine?" he cried. "Say you believe me."

"I would stake my life on your innocence, father," she replied, through her tears. "I believe in you as I do in Heaven. You shall not die! I will save you, father. I—I—will—marry Jasper Wilde, if that will save you!"

She spoke the words clearly, bravely. Her father did not realize that they nearly cost her her life—that they dug a grave long and deep, in which her hopes and rosy day-dreams were to be buried.

"You have saved me, Bernardine!" he cried, joyously. "Oh, how you must love

me—poor, old, and helpless as I am!"

She answered him with kisses and tears; she could not trust herself to speak.

She rose abruptly from her knees, and quitted the room with unsteady steps.

"Thank Heaven it is over!" muttered David Moore, with a sigh. "Bernardine has consented, and I am saved!"

The day that followed was surely the darkest sweet Bernardine Moore had ever known. But it came to an end at last, and with the evening came Jay Gardiner.

He knew as soon as he greeted Bernardine and her father that something out of the usual order had transpired, the old basket-maker greeted him so stiffly, Bernardine so constrainedly.

Bernardine's manner was quite as sweet and kind, but she did not hold out to him the little hand which it was heaven on earth to him to clasp even for one brief instant.

Looking at her closely, he saw that her beautiful dark eyes were heavy and swollen with weeping.

"Poor child! She is continually grieving over the drinking habit of her father," he thought; and the bitterest anger rose up in his heart against the old basket-maker for bringing a tear to those beautiful dark eyes.

Again the longing came to him to beat down all barriers that parted her from him, take Bernardine in his arms, and crying out how madly he loved her, bear his beautiful love away as his idolized bride to his own palatial home. But the thought of that other one, to whom he was in honor and in duty bound, kept him silent.

He realized that for his own peace of mind and hers he must never see Bernardine again; that this must be the last time.

"I am sorry your father has fallen asleep, yet I do not wish to waken him, for I have come to say farewell to him and to you, Miss Moore," he said, huskily.

He saw the lovely face grow as white as a snow-drop; he saw all the glad light leave the great dark eyes; he saw the beautiful lips pale and the little hands tremble, and the sight was almost more than he could endure, for he read by these signs that which he had guessed before—that the sweet, fond, tender heart

of Bernardine had gone out to him as his had gone out to her.

"Are you sorry, my poor girl?" he asked, brokenly.

"Yes," she answered, not attempting to stay her bitter tears, "I shall miss you. Life will never be the same to me again."

He stopped before her, and caught her passionately to him.

"Dear Heaven, help me to say good-bye to you!" he cried; "for you must realize the truth, Bernardine. I love you—oh, I love you with all the strength of my heart and soul! Yet we must part!"

CHAPTER XV.

"I LOVE YOU! I CAN NOT KEEP THE SECRET ANY LONGER!"

For a moment Bernardine rested in his arms while Jay Gardiner cried over and over again, reckless as to how it would end:

"Yes, I love you, Bernardine, with all my heart, with all my soul!"

But it was for a moment only; then the girl struggled out of the strong arms that infolded her, with the expression of a startled fawn in her dark, humid eyes.

"Oh, Doctor Gardiner, don't; please don't!" she gasped, shrinking from him with quivering lips, and holding up her white hands as though to ward him off. "You must not speak to me; indeed, you must not!"

"Why should I not tell you the secret that is eating my heart away!" he cried, hoarsely.

Before he could add another word, she answered, quickly:

"Let me tell you why it is not right to listen to you, Doctor Gardiner. I—I am the promised wife of Jasper Wilde!"

If she had struck him a blow with her little white hand he could not have been more astounded.

His arms fell to his sides, and his face grew ashen pale.

"You are to marry Jasper Wilde?" he cried, hoarsely. "I can not believe the evidence of my own senses, Bernardine!"

She did not answer, but stood before him with her beautiful head drooped on her breast.

"You do not love him, Bernardine!" cried Jay Gardiner, bitterly. "Tell me—answer me this—why are you to marry him?"

Her lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"If I should sue to you upon my bended knees to be mine, Bernardine, would you not turn from him for me?"

He knew by the piteous sob that welled from the very depths of her heart how deeply this question must have struck her.

"Bernardine," he cried, hoarsely, "if ever I read love in a girl's heart when her eyes have met mine, I have read it in yours! You love me, Bernardine. You can not, you dare not deny it. I repeat, if I were to sue you on my bended knees, could you, would you refuse to be my wife?"

"I—must—marry—Jasper Wilde," she whispered, wretchedly.

Without another word, stung by pride and pain, Jay Gardiner turned from the girl he had learned to love so madly, and hurried down the dark, winding stairs, and out into the street.

For one moment poor Bernardine gazed at the open door-way through which his retreating form had passed; then she flung herself down on her knees, and wept as women weep but once in a life-time.

Wounded love, outraged pride, the sense of keen and bitter humiliation, and yet of dread necessity, was strong upon her. And there was no help for her, no comfort in those tears.

"Was ever a girl so wronged?" she moaned.

She wept until there seemed to be no tears left in those dark, mournful eyes. As she lay there, like a pale, broken lily, with her head and heart aching, she wondered, in her gentle way, why this sorrow should have fallen upon her.

While she lay there, weeping her very heart out, Jay Gardiner was walking down the street, his brain in a whirl, his emotions wrenching his very soul.

Miss Pendleton had written him that she would expect him to call that evening. He had been about to write her that it would be an impossibility; but now he changed his mind. Going there would be of some benefit to him, after all, for it would bring him surcease of sorrow for one brief hour, forgetfulness of Bernardine during that time.

It touched him a little to see how delightedly the girl welcomed him. She, too,

was a money-seeker like the rest of her sex; but he could also see that she was in love with him.

"I have been home for three days, and you have not even remembered that fact," she said, brightly, yet with a very reproachful look.

"If you will pardon the offense, I will promise not to be so remiss in the future."

"I shall hold you to your word," she declared. "But dear me, how pale and haggard you look! That will never do for a soon-to-be bridegroom!"

His brow darkened. The very allusion to his coming marriage was most hateful to him. Sally could see that, though she pretended not to notice it.

Mr. and Mrs. Pendleton came in to welcome him, being so profuse in their greeting that they annoyed him.

Louisa was more sensible. Her welcome was quiet, not to say constrained.

"If it had been Louisa instead of Sally," he mused, bitterly, "the fate that I have brought upon myself would be more bearable."

He was so miserable as he listened to Sally's ceaseless chatter that he felt that if he had a revolver, he would shoot himself then and there, and thus end it all.

CHAPTER XVI.

"WHERE THERE IS NO JEALOUSY
THERE IS LITTLE LOVE!"

It was a relief to Jay Gardiner when he found himself out of the house and on the street. The short two hours he had passed in Sally's society were more trying on his nerves than the hardest day's work could have been.

He groaned aloud at the thought of the long years he was destined to live though, with this girl as his companion.

He had come at seven, and made his adieu at nine. Sally then went upstairs to her mother's room with a very discontented face, and entered the *boudoir* in anything but the best of humors.

Mrs. Pendleton looked up from the book she was reading, with an expression of astonishment and wonder.

"Surely Doctor Gardiner has not gone so soon!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, he has," replied Sally, laconically.

"I suppose some important duty called him away so early?"

"He did not say so," returned her daughter, crossly.

"Is he coming soon again?" questioned Mrs. Pendleton, anxiously.

"I don't know," replied Sally; adding, slowly: "When I tried to find out when he would call again, he seemed annoyed, and replied, curtly: 'That will be hard for me to determine, Miss Pendleton. You must remember that those in my profession have few leisure hours.' He would not set a time. I had to let the matter rest at that."

"He is not very much in love, then, I fear, my dear Sally," said her mother, reflectively. "Still, bad beginnings often make good endings. But I had almost

forgotten to tell you the startling news, my dear," added Mrs. Pendleton, hastily. "Your aunt, Sally Rogers, is here. Louisa is entertaining her up in her *boudoir*. You must not be surprised, or show too much amusement when you see her. She is a sight. We would be eternally disgraced if the neighbors were to see her. She is fairly covered with rags—yes, rags! There are holes in her shoes; there never was such a bonnet worn since the time of the ark; and as for gloves, she disdains such an article of feminine attire altogether. I do not think one will have to wait long to come into possession of her fortune. But run up to your sister's room and greet old Miss Sally as affectionately as possible."

Sally was rather glad of this intelligence, for it prevented her from having a very bad case of the blues in thinking over her lover's coldness, and how irksome this betrothal was to him.

She found her sister doing her utmost to entertain the most grotesque little old woman she had ever beheld. Her mother's description had certainly not been overdrawn.

Sally felt like bursting into uproarious laughter the moment her eyes fell upon Miss Rogers, and it was only by a most superhuman effort she controlled herself from letting her rising mirth get the better of her.

"Dear me, *is* this, *can* this be jolly little Sally Pendleton, as you used to sign the merry letters you wrote to me?" asked Miss Rogers, stopping short in some remark she was making to Louisa, and gazing hard at the slender, girlish figure that had just appeared on the threshold.

"Yes, it is I, Sally Pendleton," responded the girl, coming quickly forward. "I just heard you were here, aunt, and I want to tell you how delighted, enraptured, overjoyed I am to see you," she added, throwing her arms around the bundle of rags which inclosed the thin little old maid, with a bear-like hug and any amount of extravagant kisses, not daring to look at Louisa the while.

"This is indeed a hearty welcome, my dear!" exclaimed Miss Rogers. "Stand off, child," she added, holding Sally at arm's-length, "until I get a good look at you."

And she gazed long and steadily.

Sally could not tell whether Miss Rogers was pleased or disappointed with her, as her face never expressed her emotions.

"I will call you and your sister my nieces; but you are not so nearly related to me

as that—-the line of relationship is a long way off. There are many others as near to me as your family."

"But none who love you anywhere near as well," put in Sally, quickly.

"I hope you mean what you say," replied Miss Rogers, quietly; adding, after a moment's pause, during which she wiped a suspicious moisture from her eyes: "I am a very lonely woman, and life offers few charms for me, because I am quite alone in the world, with no one to care for me. I have often thought that I would give the whole world, if it were mine to give, for just one human being to whom I was dear. I am desolate; my heart hungers for sympathy and kindness, and—and a little affection. I have neither father nor mother, sister nor brother, husband nor children. I hope neither of you girls will ever experience the hopelessness, the heartache conveyed in those words. It is hard, bitterly cruel, to be left alone in the world. But I suppose Heaven intended it to be so, and—and knows best."

"You shall never know loneliness again, dear aunt," murmured Louisa. "To make every moment of your life happy will be our only aim."

"Thank you, my dear," replied Miss Rogers, tremulously.

"You shall live with us always, if you will, aunt," said Sally, "and be one of the family. You may have my *boudoir* all to yourself, and I will take the small spare room next to it."

"You are very good to me," said Miss Rogers, huskily.

Mrs. Pendleton had been busy getting the handsome guest-chamber ready for their wealthy kinswoman. She entered just in time to overhear Sally's last remark.

"Miss Rogers shall have a larger, handsomer *boudoir* than yours, Sally," remarked her mother. "The entire suite of rooms on this floor is at her disposal, if she will only allow us to persuade her to remain with us. My dear daughters, you must add your entreaties on this point to your father's and mine."

"How can I ever repay you for your deep interest in a lone body like me?" murmured Miss Rogers.

The eyes of the girls and those of their mother met; but they did not dare express in words the thought that had leaped simultaneously into their minds at her words.

"You have had no one to look after your wardrobe, dear Aunt Rogers," said Mrs. Pendleton; "so do, I beseech you, accept some of my gowns until you desire to lay them aside for fresher ones."

"I am bewildered by so much kindness," faltered Miss Rogers. And she was more bewildered still at the array of silks and satins and costly laces with which the three ladies deluged her.

The very finest rooms in the house were given her. Miss Sally made her a strong punch with her own hands, "just the way she said she liked it," and Louisa bathed her face in fragrant cologne, and tried on a lace night-cap with a great deal of fuss.

Some one came in to turn down the night-lamp a little later on—a quiet, slender figure in a dark-brown gown. It was not Mrs. Pendleton, nor was it either of her daughters.

"Who are you?" asked Miss Rogers, perceiving at a glance that she was evidently no servant of the household. A sweet, pale, wan face was turned toward her.

"I an Patience Pendleton," replied a still sweeter voice.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Rogers, "I never heard that there were three daughters in this family." She could see, even in that dim light, the pink flush steal quickly over the wan, white face.

"I am a daughter by my father's first marriage," she answered, quietly. "My step-mother and her daughters seldom mention me to any one."

There was no suspicion of malice in her tone, only sadness; and without another word, save a gentle good-night, she glided from the room.

It was Sally, bright, jolly Sally, who awakened Miss Rogers the next morning. Louisa insisted upon helping her to dress, while Mr. and Mrs. Pendleton tapped at the door, and eagerly inquired if she had rested well.

She was given the seat of honor at the breakfast-table, and a huge bouquet of hot-house roses lay at her plate.

Sally had inquired the night before as to her favorite viands, and they were soon placed before her deliciously prepared.

Louisa brought a dainty hassock for her feet, and Mrs. Pendleton a silken scarf, to protect her from the slightest draught from the open windows.

"You treat me as though I were a queen," said Miss Rogers, smiling through her tears.

She could scarcely eat her breakfast, Sally and Louisa hung about her chair so attentively, ready to anticipate her slightest wish. But looking around, she missed the sweet, wistful face that she had seen in her room the night before.

"Are all the family assembled here?" she inquired, wondering if it had not been a dream she had had of a sweet white face and a pair of sad gray eyes.

"All except Patience," replied Mrs. Pendleton, with a frown. "She's rather queer, and prefers not to join us at table or in the drawing-room. She spends all her time up in the attic bedroom reading the Bible and writing Christmas stories for children for the religious papers. We don't see her for weeks at a time, and actually forget she lives in this house. She's quite a religious crank, and you won't see much of her."

Miss Rogers saw the girls laugh and titter at their mother's remarks; and from that moment they lowered in her estimation, while sweet Patience was exalted.

CHAPTER XVII.

The next few days that passed were like a dream to Miss Rogers. Every one was so kind and considerate it seemed that she was living in another world.

Mrs. Pendleton had cautioned the girls against mentioning the fact of Sally's coming marriage, explaining that she might change her mind about leaving her fortune to the family if she knew there was a prospect of wealth for them from any other source.

"But it would not be fair to let her make sister Sally her heiress," said Louisa, bitterly. "She ought not to get both fortunes. She will come into a magnificent fortune through marrying Jay Gardiner. Why should you want her to have Miss Rogers' money, too? You ought to influence that eccentric old lady to leave her fortune to *me*."

"Hush, my dear. Miss Rogers might hear you," warned her mother.

But the warning had come too late. In coming down the corridor to join the family in the general sitting-room, as they had always insisted on her doing, she had overheard Miss Louisa's last remark.

She stopped short, the happy light dying from her eyes, and the color leaving her cheeks.

"Great Heaven! have I been deceived, after all? Was the kindness of the Pendleton girls and their parents only assumed? Was there a monetary reason back of it all?" she mused.

A great pain shot through her heart; a wave of intense bitterness filled her soul.

"I will test these girls," muttered Miss Rogers, setting her lips together; "and that, too, before another hour passes over my head."

After a few moments more of deliberation, she arose, and with firm step passed slowly down the broad hall to the sitting-room.

Mrs. Pendleton and her eldest daughter Louisa had left the apartment. Sally alone was there, lounging on a divan, her hair in curl-papers, reading the latest French novel.

On her entering, down went the book, and Sally sprung up, her face wreathed in smiles.

"I was just wondering if you were lonely or taking a nap," she murmured, sweetly. "Do come right in, Miss Rogers, and let me draw the nicest easy-chair in the room up to the cool window for you and make you comfortable."

"How considerate you are, my dear child," replied Miss Rogers, fairly hating herself for believing this sweet young girl could dissemble. "I am glad to find you alone, Sally," she continued, dropping into the chair with a weary sigh. "I have been wanting to have a confidential little chat with you, my dear, ever since I have been here. Have you the time to spare?"

Sally Pendleton's blue eyes glittered. Of course Miss Rogers wanted to talk to her about leaving her money to her.

Sally brought a hassock, and placing it at her feet, sat down upon it, and rested her elbows on Miss Rogers' chair.

"Now," she said, with a tinkling little laugh that most every one liked to hear—the laugh that had given her the *sobriquet*, jolly Sally Pendleton, among her companions—an appellation which had ever since clung to her—"now I am ready to listen to whatever you have to tell me."

After a long pause, which seemed terribly irksome to Sally, Miss Rogers slowly said:

"I think I may as well break right into the subject that is on my mind, and troubling me greatly, without beating around the bush."

"That will certainly be the best way," murmured Sally.

"Well, then, my dear," said Miss Rogers, with harsh abruptness, "I am afraid I am living in this house under false colors."

Sally's blue eyes opened wide. She did not know what to say.

"The truth is, child, I am not the rich woman people credit me with being. I did not tell you that I had lost my entire fortune, and that I was reduced to penury

and want—ay, I would have been reduced to starvation if you had not so kindly taken me in and done for me."

"What! You have lost your great fortune? *You are penniless?*" fairly shrieked Sally, springing to her feet and looking with amazement into the wrinkled face above her.

Miss Rogers nodded assent, inwardly asking Heaven to pardon her for this, her first deliberate falsehood.

"And you came here to us, got the best room in our house, and all of mamma's best clothes, and you a beggar!"

Miss Rogers fairly trembled under the storm of wrath she had evoked.

"I—I did not mention it when I first came, because I had somehow hoped you would care for me for myself, even though my money was gone, dear child."

A sneering, scornful laugh broke from Sally's lips, a glare hateful to behold flashed from her eyes.

"You have deceived us shamefully!" she cried. "How angry papa and mamma and Louisa will be to learn that we have been entertaining a pauper!"

"Perhaps you have been entertaining an angel unawares," murmured Miss Rogers.

"God forgive you, girl, for showing so little heart!" exclaimed Miss Rogers, rising slowly to her feet.

"I shall take no saucy remarks from you!" cried Sally, harshly. "Come, make haste! Take off those fine clothes, and be gone as fast as you can!"

"But I have nothing to put on," said Miss Rogers.

Sally instantly touched the bell, and when the maid came in response to her summons, she said, quickly:

"Bring me that bundle of clothes mamma laid out for you to give to the charity collector to-day."

Wonderingly the maid brought the bundle, and she wondered still more when Miss Sally ordered her to go down to the servants' hall, and not to come up until she was called for.

"Now, then," she cried, harshly, after the door had closed upon the maid, "get into these duds at once!"

Miss Rogers obeyed; and when at length the change was made, Sally pointed to the door and cried, shrilly:

"Now go!"

"But the storm!" persisted Miss Rogers, piteously. "Oh, Sally, at least let me stay until the storm has spent its fury!"

"Not an instant!" cried Sally Pendleton, fairly dragging her from the room and down the corridor to the main door, which she flung open, thrust her victim through it, and out into the storm.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FATE WEAVES A STRANGE WEB.

If Sally Pendleton had taken the trouble to look out after the trembling old woman she had thrust so unceremoniously into the raging storm, she would not have gone up to her own room with such a self-satisfied smile on her face.

Just as that little scene was taking place, a brougham, drawn by a pair of spirited horses, was being driven rapidly down the street, and was almost abreast of the house as this extraordinary little drama was being enacted.

Its occupant had ordered the driver to halt at the Pendleton mansion, and looking out of the window, he had seen with amazement the whole occurrence—had seen Sally Pendleton, who had always posed before him as a sweet-tempered angel—actually thrust a feeble-looking, poorly-dressed woman out of the house and into the street to face a storm so wild and pitiless that most people would have hesitated before even turning a homeless, wandering cur out into it.

Doctor Gardiner's carriage drew up quickly before the curbstone, and as he sprung from the vehicle, his astonishment can better be imagined than described at finding himself face to face with his friend, Miss Rogers, and that it was she who had been ejected so summarily. The poor soul almost fainted for joy when she beheld the young physician.

"My dear Miss Rogers!" he cried in amazement, "what in the name of Heaven does the scene I have just witnessed mean?"

"Take me into your carriage, and drive down the street; that is, if you are not in a hurry to make a professional call."

Jay Gardiner lifted the drenched, trembling woman in his strong arms, placed her in the vehicle, took his seat beside her, and the brougham rolled down the avenue.

Clinging to his strong young arm, Miss Rogers told, between her smiles and

tears, all that had taken place—of the test which she had put the Pendletons to before leaving her money to the girl Sally, who had been named after her; of its disastrous ending when she told Sally she was poor instead of rich; of the abuse the girl had heaped upon her, which ended by throwing her into the street.

She told all, keeping back nothing, little dreaming that Jay Gardiner knew the Pendletons, and, least of all, that Sally was his betrothed.

He listened with darkening brow, his stern lips set, his handsome, jovial, laughing face strangely white.

What could he say to her? He dared not give vent to his bitter thoughts, and denounce the girl he was in honor bound to give his name and shield from all the world's remarks.

"You have learned your lesson, Miss Rogers," he said, slowly. "Now be content to return to your own luxurious home and its comforts, a sadder and wiser woman."

"I have not tested *all* yet," she returned. "There is yet another family, whose address I have recently discovered after the most patient search. I had a cousin by marriage who ran off with a sea-captain. She died, leaving one child, a little daughter. The father no longer follows the sea, but lives at home with the girl, following the trade of basket-making, at which he is quite an expert, I am told, if he would only let drink alone."

Jay Gardiner started violently. The color came and went in his face, his strong hands trembled. He was thankful she did not notice his emotion.

"The man's name is David Moore," she went on, reflectively, "and the girl's is Bernardine. A strange name for a girl, don't you think so?"

"A beautiful name," he replied, with much feeling; "and I should think the girl who bears it might have all the sweet, womanly graces you long to find in a human being."

Miss Rogers gave him the street and number, which he knew but too well, and asked him to drive her within a few doors of the place, where she would alight.

When she was so near her destination that she did not have time to ask questions, he said, abruptly:

"I know this family—the old basket-maker and his daughter. I attended him in a recent illness. They seem very worthy, to me, of all confidence. There is a world of difference between this young girl Bernardine and the one you describe as Miss Sally Pendleton. Please don't mention that you know me, Miss Rogers, if you would do me a favor," he added, as she alighted.

The landing was so dark she could hardly discern where the door was on which to knock.

She heard the sound of voices a moment later. This sound guided her, and she was soon tapping at a door which was slightly ajar. She heard some one say from within:

"Some one is rapping at the door, Bernardine. Send whoever it is away. The sight of a neighbor's face, or her senseless gossip, would drive me crazy, Bernardine."

"I shall not invite any one in if it annoys you, father," answered a sweet, musical voice.

Miss Rogers leaned against the door-frame, wondering what the girl was like who had so kindly a voice.

There was the soft *frou-frou* of a woman's skirts, the door was opened, and a tall, slender young girl stood on the threshold, looking inquiringly into the stranger's face.

"I am looking for the home of David Moore and of his daughter Bernardine," said Miss Rogers.

"This is David Moore's home, and I am his daughter Bernardine," said the young girl, courteously, even though the stranger before her was illy clad.

"Won't you invite me in for a few moments?" asked Miss Rogers, wistfully. "I heard what some one, your father probably, said about not wanting to see any one just now. But I can not well come again, and it is raining torrents outside."

"Yes, you may enter, and remain until the storm abates," said Bernardine, cheerfully. "My father would not let any one leave his door in such a storm as this. Pray come in, madame."

"It is kind of you to say 'madame' to a creature like me," sighed the stranger, following the girl into the poorly furnished but scrupulously neat apartment.

Bernardine smiled.

"When I was very young, one of the first lessons my dear mother taught me was to be polite to every one," she returned, quietly.

"You look like your mother, my dear," said Miss Rogers, huskily. "I—I was afraid you would not."

"Did you know my mother?" exclaimed Bernardine, clasping her hands together, and looking eagerly at the stranger in the coarse, ill-fitting gown.

"Yes, my dear; I knew her years ago, when we were both young girls. She looked then as you do now. I was distantly related to her, in fact. I—I was wealthy in those days, but I have since lost all my money, and am now reduced to penury—ay, to want," murmured the shabbily dressed woman.

Bernardine sprung forward excitedly.

"Surely you can not be the great Miss Rogers of California, of whom I have heard her speak thousands of times?"

"Yes, I am Miss Rogers, my dear; great once, in the eyes of the world, when I had money, but despised now, that I am reduced and in want."

In a moment Bernardine's arms were around her, and tears were falling from the girl's beautiful dark eyes.

"Oh, do not say that, dear Miss Rogers!" she cried. "*I* love you because my mother loved you in the days that are past. Money does not always bring love, and the loss of it can not lessen the love of those who owe us allegiance, and who have a true affection for us. Welcome, a thousand times welcome to our home, dear aunt, if you will let me call you that; and—and I shall use my influence to have father invite you to share our humble home forever, if you only will."

"No, no, Bernardine," replied Miss Rogers. "You have mouths enough to earn bread for."

"One more would not signify," declared Bernardine; "and your presence beneath this roof would amply compensate me. I would take a world of pleasure in working a little harder than I do now to keep you here."

"Before you give me too much hope on that point you had better talk it over with

your father. He may think differently from what you do. He may not want to keep a tramp's boarding-house," she added, quietly.

"Father will be sure to think as I do," reiterated Bernardine. "He has a rough exterior, but the kindest of hearts beats in his rugged bosom."

"You are right there, Bernardine," said David Moore, pushing open an inner door and coming forward. "I could not help overhearing all that passed between you two. I am sorry you have lost all your money, Miss Rogers; but that will not make any difference in the heartiness of the welcome we give you; and if Bernardine wants you to stay here with us, stay you shall. So take off your bonnet, and make yourself at home."

CHAPTER XIX.

"TRUE LOVE NEVER DOES RUN SMOOTH."

Miss Rogers was quite overcome by the hearty welcome she received from David Moore, the old basket-maker, and Bernardine, his lovely daughter. It went straight to her lonely heart, because she knew it was genuine friendship untainted by mercenary motives.

She shared Bernardine's humble yet dainty apartment, and fell quite naturally into being a member of the household.

There was one thing which puzzled her greatly, and that was, the sighs that would rend sweet Bernardine's breast while she was sleeping.

"The girl has some secret sorrow which she is hiding from the world," she thought, anxiously. "I must find out what it is."

She had been an inmate of Bernardine's home for a week before she learned that the girl was soon to be wedded. Bernardine's father told her, hinting triumphantly that that event would mean the dawn of a more prosperous future for the family, as her intended husband was very rich—had money to burn.

"Don't say much about him to Bernardine," he added, quickly; "for she's not in love with him by any means."

"Then why is she going to marry him?" asked Miss Rogers, amazedly.

"He has money," replied David Moore, nodding his head wisely; "and that's what sharp girls are looking for nowadays."

"I thought love was the ruling power which moved young girls' hearts," responded Miss Rogers, slowly. "At least, it used to be when I was a young girl like Bernardine."

He laughed uneasily, but made no reply, as Bernardine entered the room at that

instant with an open letter in her hand.

"Jasper Wilde has returned to the city, father," she said, tremulously, "and—and he is coming here this evening to see us."

As the girl uttered the words, Miss Rogers was quite sure she could detect the sound of tears in her quivering voice.

"I am very glad," replied David Moore, endeavoring to speak lightly. "I shall be mighty pleased to see my prospective son-in-law."

Bernardine drew back quickly, her lovely face pitifully pale, then turned abruptly and hurried from the room.

Miss Rogers followed her. The girl went to her own apartment, threw herself on her knees, and burying her face in the counterpane, wept such bitter, passionate tears that Miss Rogers was alarmed for her.

"You poor child!" exclaimed Miss Rogers. "Sit down here beside me, and tell me the whole story—let me understand it."

"I can not tell you any more. I met one whom I *could* love, and—we—parted. I sent him away because my father had declared that I should marry this other one."

"Because of his wealth?" said Miss Rogers, in a strangely hard voice.

"No, no! Do not do my father that injustice. It was not because of his wealth. I—I should have had to marry him had he been the poorest man in the city."

"It is cruel, it is outrageous, to ask a young girl to marry a man whom she detests. It is barbarous. In my opinion, that is carrying parental authority too far. This marriage must not take place, Bernardine. It would be wicked—a sin against God."

Although Miss Rogers did her best to probe into the mystery—for Bernardine's sake—the girl was strangely obdurate. So she said no more to her on the subject just then; but when she approached David Moore on this topic, his incoherent replies puzzled her still more.

"I am much obliged to you for taking such an interest in Bernardine's affairs; but let me warn you of one thing, Miss Rogers, while you are under my roof, don't attempt to meddle with what does not concern you in any way. By heeding my

remark, we shall keep good friends. This marriage must take place. The young fellow is good enough, and she'll get to like him after awhile. See if she doesn't."

The harsh, abrupt manner in which he uttered these words told Miss Rogers that little hope could be entertained from that source.

Bernardine had almost cried herself ill by the time Jasper Wilde's knock was heard on the door.

Mr. Moore answered the summons.

"Is there any use in my coming in?" asked Wilde, grimly, coming to a halt on the threshold. "Does your daughter consent to marry me? I could not make head or tail out of your letter."

"Bernardine's answer is—yes," murmured the old man, almost incoherently. "She consents for *my* sake; though Heaven knows I'm not worth the sacrifice."

"*Sacrifice!*" repeated Jasper Wilde in a high, harsh voice. "Come, now, that's too good. It's me that's making the sacrifice, by cheating the hangman and justice of their just due, Moore; and don't you forget it."

Sooner than he expected, Bernardine made her appearance.

Jasper Wilde sprung up to welcome her, both hands outstretched, his eyes fairly gloating over the vision of pure girlish loveliness which she presented.

She drew back, waving him from her with such apparent loathing that he was furious.

"I do not pretend to welcome you, Jasper Wilde," she said, "for that would be acting a lie from which my soul revolts. I will say at once what you have come here to-night to hear from my lips. I will marry you—to—save—my—poor—father," she stammered. "I used to think the days of buying and selling human beings were over; but it seems not. The white slave you buy will make no murmur in the after years; only I shall pray that my life will not be a long one."

Jasper Wilde frowned darkly.

"You are determined to play the high and mighty tragedy queen with me, Bernardine," he cried. "Take care that your ways do not turn my love for you into hate! Beware, I tell you! A smile would bring me to your feet, a scornful curl of those red lips would raise a demon in me that you would regret if you

aroused it."

"Your hate or your love is a matter of equal indifference to me," returned the young girl, proudly.

This remark made him furious with wrath.

"You love that white-handed fellow whom I met the last time I was here. That's what makes you so indifferent to me!" he cried, hoarsely. "Speak! Is it not so?"

"Yes," replied Bernardine, cresting her beautiful head, proudly. "Yes, I love him, and I do not fear to tell you so!"

"Then, by Heaven! I will kill him on sight!" cried Jasper Wilde. "I will not brook a rival for your affections! The man you love is doomed!"

CHAPTER XX.

"IT WOULD BE WISER TO MAKE A FRIEND THAN AN ENEMY OF ME."

Bernardine Moore drew herself up to her full height, and looked the scorn she felt for the man standing before her, as he gave utterance to his hatred of Doctor Gardiner.

"It is a coward only who threatens one who is not present to defend himself!" she answered; adding, icily: "I imagine when you meet Doctor Gardiner you will find a foeman worthy of your steel."

"You are not in the most amiable mood this evening. I hope you will receive me more pleasantly the next time. Good-night, my beautiful sweetheart. *Au revoir* for the present, obstinate though fairest of all sweethearts."

Ere Bernardine had time to divine his intention, he had caught her in his arms, pressed her close to his throbbing heart, and although she struggled all she knew how, he succeeded in covering her face, her neck, her brow with his hot, wine-tainted kisses, the while laughing hilariously as he noted how loathsome they were to the lovely young girl.

Bernardine, with a wild shriek, broke at last from his grasp, and dashed madly from the sitting-room to her own apartment, which she reached in time to fall fainting in Miss Rogers' arms, the sting of those bitter kisses burning her lips like flame.

As Jasper Wilde leisurely put on his hat and walked out of the sitting-room, Miss Rogers suddenly confronted him.

"I would like a word with you, Jasper Wilde," she said, brusquely, barring his way.

"Who are you, and what do you want with me?" he demanded, with a harsh imprecation on his lips, thinking her one of his father's tenants.

"I want to intercede with you for poor Bernardine Moore," she said, simply. "Let me plead with you to forego this marriage, which I earnestly assure you is most hateful to her, for she loves another."

The flashing fire in his hard black eyes might have warned her that he was an edged tool, and that it was dangerous to encounter him.

"Out of my way, you cursed old fool!" he cried, savagely; "or I'll take you by the neck and fling you to the bottom of the stairs!"

Miss Rogers was sorely frightened, but she nobly held her ground.

"Your bullying does not terrify me in the least, Jasper Wilde," she said, calmly. "I have seen such men as you before. I would have talked with you quietly; but since you render that an impossibility, I will end my interview with one remark, one word of warning. Attempt to force Bernardine Moore into this hateful marriage, and it will be at your peril. Hear me, and understand what I say: She shall never wed you!"

"I should be as big a fool as you are, woman, if I lost time bandying words with you!" he cried, sneeringly. "If Bernardine has deputized you to waylay me and utter that nonsensical threat, you may go back and tell her that her clever little plan has failed ignominiously. I am proof against threats of women."

Miss Rogers looked after him with wrathful eyes.

"If there was ever a fiend incarnate, that man is one," she muttered. "Heaven help poor Bernardine if she carries out her intention of marrying him! He will surely kill her before the honeymoon is over! Poor girl! what direful power has he over her? Alas! I tremble for her future. It would be the marriage of an angel and a devil. Poor Bernardine! why does she not elope with the young lover whom she loves, if there is no other way out of the difficulty, and live for love, instead of filial duty and obedience?"

Bernardine worked harder than ever over her basket-making during the next few days—worked to fill every moment of her time, so as to forget, if she could, the tragedy—for it was nothing less—of her approaching marriage to Jasper Wilde.

She grew thinner and paler with each hour that dragged by, and the tears were in her eyes all the while, ready to roll down her cheeks when she fancied she was not observed.

Once or twice she spoke to Miss Rogers about the man she loved, telling her how grand, noble, and good he was, and how they had fallen in love with each other at first sight; but she never mentioned his name.

"God help poor Bernardine!" she sobbed. "I do not know how to save the darling girl. I think I will lay the matter before my dear young friend, Doctor Gardiner. He is bright and clever. Surely he can find some way out of the difficulty. Yes, I will go and see Jay Gardiner without delay; or, better still, I will write a note to have him come here to see me."

She said nothing to Bernardine, but quietly wrote a long and very earnest letter to her young friend, asking him to come without delay to the street and number where he had left her a week previous, as she had something of great importance to consult him about.

CHAPTER XXI.

JASPER WILDE MEETS WITH AN ADVENTURE.

Miss Rogers had taken the greatest pains to direct her all-important letter to Doctor Jay Gardiner, and had gone to the nearest box to mail it herself. But, alas! for the well-laid plans of mice and men which gang aft aglee.

Fate, strange, inexorable Fate, which meddles in all of our earthly affairs, whether we will or not, ordained that this letter should not reach its destination for many a day, and it happened in this way:

Quite by accident, when it left Miss Rogers' hand, the letter dropped in the depths of the huge mail-box and became wedged securely in a crevice or crack in the bottom.

The mail-gatherer was always in a hurry, and when he took up the mail on his rounds, he never noticed the letter pressed securely against the side down in the furthermost corner.

Sitting anxiously awaiting a response to her missive, or her young friend to come in person, Miss Rogers watched and waited for Jay Gardiner, or any tidings of him, in vain.

Meanwhile, the preparations for the obnoxious marriage which she seemed unable to prevent went steadily on.

All the long nights through Bernardine would weep and moan and wring her little white hands. When Miss Rogers attempted to expostulate with her, declaring no one could compel her to marry Jasper Wilde against her will, she would only shake her head and cry the more bitterly, moaning out that she did not understand.

"I confess, Bernardine, I do not understand you," she declared, anxiously. "You will not try to help yourself, but are going willingly, like a lamb to the slaughter,

as it were."

David Moore seemed to be as unnerved as Bernardine over the coming marriage. If he heard a sound in Bernardine's room at night, he would come quickly to her door and ask if anything was the matter. He seemed to be always awake, watching, listening for something. The next day he would say to Miss Rogers:

"I was sorely afraid something was happening to Bernardine last night—that she was attempting to commit suicide, or something of that kind. A girl in her highly nervous state of mind will bear watching."

"Your fears on that score are needless," replied Miss Rogers. "No matter whatever else Bernardine might do, she would never think of taking her life into her own hands, I assure you."

But the old basket-maker was not so sure of that. He had a strange presentiment of coming evil which he could not shake off.

Each evening, according to his declared intention, Jasper Wilde presented himself at David Moore's door.

"There's nothing like getting my bride-to-be a little used to me," he declared to her father, with a grim laugh.

Once after Jasper Wilde had bid Bernardine and her father good-night, he walked along the street, little caring in which direction he went, his mind was so preoccupied with trying to solve the problem of how to make this haughty girl care for him.

His mental query was answered in the strangest manner possible.

Almost from out the very bowels of the earth, it seemed—for certainly an instant before no human being was about—a woman suddenly appeared and confronted him—a woman so strange, uncanny, and weird-looking, that she seemed like some supernatural creature.

"Would you like to have your fortune told, my bonny sir?" she queried in a shrill voice. "I bring absent ones together, tell you how to gain the love of the one you want——"

"You do, eh?" cut in Jasper Wilde, sharply. "Well, now, if you can do anything like that, you ought to have been able to have retired, worth your millions, long

ago, with people coming from all over the world to get a word of advice from you."

"I care nothing for paltry money," replied the old woman, scornfully. "I like to do all the good I can."

"Oh, you work for nothing, then? Good enough. You shall tell me my fortune, and how to win the love of the girl I care for. It will be cheap advice enough, since it comes free."

"I have to ask a little money," responded the old dame in a wheedling tone. "I can't live on air, you know. But let me tell you, sir, there's something I could tell you that you ought to know—you have a rival for the love of the girl you want. Look sharp, or you'll lose her."

"By the Lord Harry! how did you find out all that?" gasped Jasper Wilde, in great amazement, his eyes staring hard, and his hands held out, as though to ward her off.

She laughed a harsh little laugh.

"That is not all I could tell if I wanted to, my bonny gentleman. You ought to know what is going on around you. I only charge a dollar to ladies and two dollars to gents. My place is close by. Will you come and let me read your future, sir?"

"Yes," returned Jasper Wilde. "But, hark you, if it is some thieves' den you want to entice me to, in order to rob me, I'll tell you here and now you will have a mighty hard customer to tackle, as I always travel armed to the teeth."

"The bonny gentleman need not fear the old gypsy," returned the woman, with convincing dignity.

Turning, he walked beside her to the end of the block.

She paused before a tall, dark tenement house, up whose narrow stair-way she proceeded to climb after stopping a moment to gather sufficient breath.

Jasper Wilde soon found himself ushered into a rather large room, which was draped entirely in black cloth hangings and decorated with mystic symbols of the sorceress's art.

An oil lamp, suspended by a wire from the ceiling, furnished all the light the

apartment could boast of.

"Sit down," said the woman, pointing to an arm-chair on the opposite side of a black-draped table.

Jasper Wilde took the seat indicated, and awaited developments.

"I tell by cards," the woman said, producing a box of black pasteboards, upon which were printed strange hieroglyphics.

It was almost an hour before Jasper Wilde took his departure from the wizard's abode, and when he did so, it was with a strangely darkened brow.

He looked fixedly at a small vial he held in his hand as he reached the nearest street lamp, and eyed with much curiosity the dark liquid it contained.

"I would do anything on earth to gain Bernardine's love," he muttered; "and for that reason I am willing to try anything that promises success in my wooing. I have never believed in fortune-tellers, and if this one proves false, I'll be down on the lot of 'em for all time to come. Five drops in a glass of water or a cup of tea."

CHAPTER XXII.

While the preparations for the marriage which poor, hapless Bernardine looked forward to with so much fear went steadily on, preparations for another wedding, in which Jay Gardiner was to be the unwilling bridegroom, progressed quite as rapidly.

On the day following the scene in which Sally Pendleton had turned Miss Rogers from the house—which had been witnessed by the indignant young doctor—he called upon his betrothed, hoping against hope that she might be induced to relent, even at the eleventh hour, and let him off from this, to him, abhorrent engagement.

He found Sally arrayed in her prettiest dress—all fluffy lace and fluttering baby-blue ribbons—but he had no eyes for her made-up, doll-like sort of beauty.

She never knew just when to expect him, for he would never give her the satisfaction of making an appointment to call, giving professional duties as an excuse for not doing so.

Sally arrayed herself in her best every evening, and looked out from behind the lace-draped windows until the great clock in the hall chimed the hour of nine; then, in an almost ungovernable rage, she would go up to her room, and her mother and Louisa would be made to suffer for her disappointment.

On the day in question she had seen Jay Gardiner coming up the stone steps, and was ready to meet him with her gayest smile, her jolliest laugh.

"It is always the unexpected which happens, Jay," she said, holding out both her lily-white hands. "Welcome, a hundred times welcome!"

He greeted her gravely. He could not have stooped and kissed the red lips that were held up to him if the action would have saved his life.

He was so silent and *distrait* during the time, that Sally said:

"Aren't you well this morning, Jay, or has something gone wrong with you?" she

asked, at length.

"I do feel a trifle out of sorts," he replied. "But pardon me for displaying my feelings before—a lady."

"Don't speak in that cold, strange fashion, Jay," replied the girl, laying a trembling hand on his arm. "You forget that I have a right to know what is troubling you, and to sympathize with and comfort you."

He looked wistfully at her.

Would it do to tell her the story of his love for Bernardine? Would she be moved to pity by the drifting apart of two lives because of a betrothal made in a spirit of fun at a race? He hardly dared hope so.

"I was thinking of a strange case that came under my observation lately," he said, "and somehow the subject has haunted me—even in my dreams—probably from the fact that it concerns a friend of mine in whom I take a great interest."

"Do tell me the story!" cried Sally, eagerly—"please do."

"It would sound rather commonplace in the telling," he responded, "as I am not good at story-telling. Well, to begin with, this friend of mine loves a fair and beautiful young girl who is very poor. A wealthy suitor, a dissipated *roué*, had gained the consent of her father to marry her, before my friend met and knew her and learned to love her. Now, he can not, dare not speak, for, although he believes in his heart that she loves him best, he knows she is bound in honor to another; and to make the matter still more pitiful, he is betrothed to a girl he is soon to marry, though his *fiancée* has no portion of his great heart. Thus, by the strange decrees of fate, which man can not always comprehend the wisdom of, four people will be wedded unhappily."

As Sally listened with the utmost intentness, she jumped to the conclusion that the "friend" whose picture Jay Gardiner had drawn so pathetically was himself, and she heard with the greatest alarm of the love he bore another. But she kept down her emotions with a will of iron. It would never do to let him know she thought him unfaithful, and it was a startling revelation to her to learn that she had a rival. She soon came to a conclusion.

"It is indeed a strangely mixed up affair," she answered. "It seems to me everything rests in the hands of this young girl, as she could have either lover. Couldn't I go to her in the interest of your friend, and do my best to urge her to

marry him instead of the other one."

"But supposing the young girl that he—my friend—is betrothed to refuses to give him up, what then?"

"I might see her," replied Sally, "and talk with her."

"It is hard for him to marry her, when every throb of his heart is for another," answered Jay Gardiner, despondently.

"Who is this young girl who is so beautiful that she has won the love of both these lovers?" she asked in a low, hard voice.

"Bernardine—— Ah! I should not tell you that," he responded, recollecting himself. But he had uttered, alas! the one fatal word—Bernardine.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I can never rest night or day until I have seen this Bernardine and swept her from my path!" she cried.

She made up her mind that she would not tell her mother or Louisa just yet. It would worry her mother to discover that she had a rival, while Louisa—well, she was so envious of her, as it was, she might exult in the knowledge.

But how should she discover who this beautiful Bernardine was of whom he spoke with so much feeling?

Suddenly she stopped short and brought her two hands together, crying, excitedly:

"Eureka! I have found a way. I will follow up this scheme, and see what I can find out. Jay Gardiner will be out of the city for a few days. I will see his office attendant—he does not know me—and will never be able to recognize me again the way I shall disguise myself, and I will learn from him what young lady the doctor knows whose name begins with Bernardine. It is not an ordinary name, and he will be sure to remember it, I am confident, if he ever heard it mentioned."

It was an easy matter for Sally to slip out of the house early the next day without attracting attention, although she was dressed in her gayest, most stunning gown.

Calling a passing cab, she entered it, and soon found herself standing before Jay Gardiner's office, which she lost no time in entering.

A young and handsome man, who sat at a desk, deeply engrossed in a medical work, looked up with an expression of annoyance on his face at being interrupted; but when he beheld a most beautiful young lady standing on the threshold, his annoyance quickly vanished, and a bland smile lighted up his countenance. He bowed profoundly, and hastened to say:

"Is there anything I can do for you, miss?"

"I want to see Doctor Gardiner," said Sally, in her sweetest, most silvery voice. "Are you the doctor?"

"No," he answered, with a shadow of regret in his tone. "I am studying with Doctor Gardiner. He has been suddenly called out of the city. He may be gone a day, possibly a week. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I fear not, sir. Still, I will tell you my errand, if I may be seated for a few moments."

"Certainly," he responded, placing a chair for his lovely young visitor; adding: "Pray pardon my seeming negligence in not asking you to be seated."

Sally sunk gracefully into the chair the young physician watching her the while with admiring eyes.

"My call on Doctor Gardiner is not to secure his services in a professional capacity," she began, hesitatingly; "but to learn from him the address of a young lady I am trying to find."

"If it is any one who is his patient, or has been at any time, I think I can help you. He has the addresses down in a book."

"But supposing he knew her socially, not professionally, her name would not be apt to be down on his list, would it?" she queried, anxiously.

"No," he admitted. "But I think I know every one whom the doctor knows socially—every one, in fact, save the young lady—a Miss Pendleton, whom he is soon to marry. You see, we were college chums, and I have been his partner in office work over five years. So I will be most likely to know if you will state the name."

"That is just the difficulty," said Sally, with her most bewildering smile, which quite captivated the young doctor. "I met the young lady only once, and I have forgotten her address as well as her last name, remembering only her Christian name—Bernardine. I met her in Doctor Gardiner's company only a few weeks ago. He would certainly recollect her name."

"Undoubtedly," declared the young physician. "I regret deeply that he is not here to give you the desired information."

"Would you do me a favor if you could, sir?" asked Sally, with a glance from her

eyes that brought every man she looked at in that way—save Jay Gardiner—to her dainty feet.

The young physician blushed to the very roots of his fair hair.

"You have only to name it, and if it is anything in my power, believe that I will do my utmost to accomplish it. I—I would do anything to—to please you."

"I would like you to find out from Doctor Gardiner the address of Bernardine," said Sally, in a low, tremulous voice; "only do not let him know that any one is interested in finding it out save yourself. Do you think you can help me?"

He pondered deeply for a moment, then his face brightened, as he said:

"I think I have hit upon a plan. I will write him, and say I have found the name Bernardine on a slip of paper which he has marked, 'Patients for prompt attention,' the balance of the name being torn from the slip, and ask the address and full information as to who she is."

"A capital idea!" exclaimed Sally, excitedly. "I—I congratulate you upon your shrewdness. If you find out this girl's address, you will place me under everlasting obligations to you."

"If you will call at this hour two days from now, I shall have the address," he said, slowly.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Much to the delight of Doctor Covert, the little beauty did call again, at the very hour he had set. But his pleasure had one drawback to it, she was heavily veiled. But, for all that, he knew how lovely was the face that veil concealed, how bright the eyes, how charming the dimples, how white the pearly teeth, how sweet the ripe red cheeks, so like Cupid's bow.

He could not conceal his great joy at beholding her again. She noticed his emotion at once. He would not have been so well pleased if he could have seen how her red lip curled in scorn as she said to herself:

"Fools fall in love with a pretty face on sight; but it is another thing to get a desirable man to fall in love. They are hard to win. I have heard of this Doctor Covert before. True, he did go to college with Jay Gardiner, and is his chum; but one is rich and the other poor."

"I hope you have been successful," murmured Sally, giving him her little white hand to hold for an instant—an instant during which he was intensely happy.

"Yes, my dear miss," he answered, quickly. "I am overjoyed to think I can be of service to you—in a way, at least. I did not communicate with Doctor Gardiner, for it occurred to me just after you left that I *had* heard him mention the name; but I am sure there is a mistake somewhere. This girl—Bernardine—whom I refer to, and whom Doctor Gardiner knows, can not possibly be a friend of yours, miss, for she is only the daughter of an humble basket-maker, and lives on the top floor of a tenement house in one of the poorest parts of the city."

Sally Pendleton's amazement was so great she could hardly repress the cry of amazement that arose to her lips.

She had never for an instant doubted that this beautiful Bernardine, who had won the proud, unbending heart of haughty Jay Gardiner, was some great heiress, royal in her pomp and pride, and worth millions of money. No wonder Doctor Covert's words almost took her breath away.

"Are you quite sure?" she responded, after a moment's pause. "Surely, as you remarked, then there must be *some* mistake."

"I am positive Doctor Gardiner knows but this one Bernardine. In fact, I heard him say that he never remembered hearing that beautiful name until he heard it for the first time in the humble home of the old basket-maker. And he went on to tell me how lovely the girl was, despite her surroundings."

The veiled lady arose hastily, her hands clinched.

"I thank you for your information," she said, huskily, as she moved rapidly toward the door.

"She is going without my even knowing who she is," thought Doctor Covert, and he sprung from his chair, saying, eagerly:

"I beg a thousand pardons if the remark I am about to make seems presumptuous; but believe that it comes from a heart not prompted by idle curiosity—far, far from that."

"What is it that you wish to know?" asked Sally, curtly.

"Who you are," he replied, with blunt eagerness. "I may as well tell you the truth. I am deeply interested in you, even though you are a stranger, and the bare possibility that we may never meet again fills me with the keenest sorrow I have ever experienced."

Sally Pendleton was equal to the occasion.

"I must throw him off the track at once by giving him a false name and address," she thought.

She hesitated only a moment.

"My name is Rose Thorne," she replied, uttering the falsehood without the slightest quiver in her voice. "I attend a private school for young ladies in Gramercy Park. We are soon to have a public reception, to which we are entitled to invite our friends, and I should be pleased to send you a card if you think you would care to attend."

"I should be delighted," declared Doctor Covert, eagerly. "If you honor me with an invitation, I shall be sure to be present. I would not miss seeing you again."

Was it only his fancy, or did he hear a smothered laugh from beneath the thick dark veil which hid the girl's face from his view?

The next moment Sally was gone, and the young doctor gazed after her, as he did on the former occasion with a sigh, and already began looking forward to the time when he should see her again. Meanwhile, Sally lost no time in finding the street and house indicated.

A look of intense amazement overspread her face as she stood in front of the tall, forbidding tenement and looked up at the narrow, grimy windows. It seemed almost incredible that handsome, fastidious Jay Gardiner would even come to such a place, let alone fall in love with an inmate of it.

"The girl must be a coarse, ill-bred working-girl," she told herself, "no matter how pretty her face may be."

A number of fleshy, ill-clad women, holding still more poorly clad, fretful children, sat on the door-step, hung out of the open windows and over the balusters, gossiping and slandering their neighbors quite as energetically as the petted wives of the Four Hundred on the fashionable avenues do.

Sally took all this in with a disgusted glance; but lifting her dainty, lace-trimmed linen skirts, she advanced boldly.

"I am in search of a basket-maker who lives somewhere in this vicinity," said Sally. "Could you tell me if he lives here?"

"He lives right here," spoke up one of the women. "David Moore is out, so is the elderly woman who is staying with him; but Miss Bernardine is in, I am certain, working busily over her baskets. If you want to see about baskets, she's the one to go to—top floor, right."

Sally made her way up the narrow, dingy stairs until she reached the top floor. The door to the right stood open, and as Sally advanced she saw a young girl turn quickly from a long pine table covered with branches of willow, and look quickly up.

Sally Pendleton stood still, fairly rooted to the spot with astonishment not unmingled with rage, for the girl upon whom she gazed was the most gloriously beautiful creature she had ever beheld. She did not wonder now that Jay Gardiner had given his heart to her.

In that one moment a wave of such furious hate possessed the soul of Sally Pendleton that it was with the greatest difficulty she could restrain herself from springing upon the unconscious young girl and wrecking forever the fatal beauty which had captivated the heart of the man who was her lover and was so soon to wed.

Sally had thrown back her veil, and was gazing at her rival with her angry soul in her eyes.

Seeing the handsomely dressed young lady, Bernardine came quickly forward with the sweet smile and graceful step habitual to her.

"You wish to see some one—my father, perhaps?" murmured Bernardine, gently.

"*You* are the person I wish to see," returned Sally, harshly—"you, and no one else."

Bernardine looked at her wonderingly. The cold, hard voice struck her ear unpleasantly, and the strange look in the stranger's hard, steel-blue eyes made her feel strangely uncomfortable.

Was it a premonition of coming evil?

CHAPTER XXV.

She was not to remain long in suspense.

"In the first place," began Sally, slowly, "I wish to know what your relations are, Bernardine Moore, with Doctor Jay Gardiner. I must and will know the truth."

She saw that the question struck the girl as lightning strikes a fair white rose and withers and blights it with its awful fiery breath.

Bernardine was fairly stricken dumb. She opened her lips to speak, but no sound issued from them. She could not have uttered one syllable if her life had depended on it.

"Let me tell you how the case stands. I will utter the shameful truth for you if you dare not admit it. He is *your lover* in secret, though he would deny you in public!"

Hapless Bernardine had borne all she could; and without a word, a cry, or even a moan she threw up her little hands, and fell in a lifeless heap at her cruel enemy's feet.

For a moment Sally Pendleton gazed at her victim, and thoughts worthy of the brain of a fiend incarnate swept through her.

"If she were only dead!" she muttered, excitedly. "Dare I——"

The sentence was never finished. There was a step on the creaking stairs outside, and with a guilty cry of alarm, Miss Pendleton rushed from the room and out into the darkened hall-way.

She brushed past a woman on the narrow stairs, but the darkness was so dense neither recognized the other; and Sally Pendleton had gained the street and turned the nearest corner, ere Miss Rogers—for it was she—reached the top landing.

As she pushed open the door, the first object that met her startled eyes was

Bernardine lying like one dead on the floor.

Despite the fact that she was an invalid, Miss Rogers' nerves were exceedingly cool. She did not shriek out, or call excitedly to the other inmates of the house, but went about reviving the girl by wetting her handkerchief with water as cold as it would run from the faucet, and laving her marble-cold face with it, and afterward rubbing her hands briskly.

She was rewarded at length by seeing the great dark eyes slowly open, and the crimson tide of life drift back to the pale, cold cheeks and quivering lips.

A look of wonder filled Bernardine's eyes as she beheld Miss Rogers bending over her.

"Was it a dream, some awful dream?" she said, excitedly, catching at her friend's hands and clinging piteously to them.

"What caused your sudden illness, Bernardine?" questioned Miss Rogers, earnestly. "You were apparently well when I left you an hour since."

Still Bernardine clung to her with that awful look of agony in her beautiful eyes, but uttering no word.

"Has she gone?" she murmured, at length.

"Has *who* gone?" questioned Miss Rogers, wondering what she meant.

"The beautiful, pitiless stranger," sobbed Bernardine, catching her breath.

Miss Rogers believed that the girl's mind was wandering, and refrained from further questioning her.

"The poor child is grieving so over this coming marriage of hers to Jasper Wilde that I almost fear her mind is giving way," she thought, in intense alarm, glancing at Bernardine.

As she did so, Bernardine began to sob again, breaking into such a passionate fit of weeping, and suffering such apparently intense grief, that Miss Rogers was at a loss what to do or say.

She would not tell why she was weeping so bitterly; no amount of questioning could elicit from her what had happened.

Not for worlds would Bernardine have told to any human being her sad story—

of the stranger's visit and the startling disclosures she had made to her.

It was not until Bernardine found herself locked securely in the seclusion of her own room that she dared look the matter fully in the face, and then the grief to which she abandoned herself was more poignant than before.

In her great grief, a terrible thought came to her. Why not end it all? Surely God would forgive her for laying down life's cross when it was too heavy to be borne.

Yes, that is what she would do. She would end it all.

Her father did not care for her; it caused him no grief to barter her, as the price of his secret, to Jasper Wilde, whom she loathed.

It lacked but one day to that marriage she so detested.

Yes, she would end it all before the morrow's sun rose.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Miss Rogers noticed that Bernardine was strangely silent and preoccupied during the remainder of that day; but she attached no particular importance to it.

She knew that the girl was wearing her heart out in brooding over the coming marriage. Jasper Wilde refused to be bought off, and Bernardine herself declared that it must take place. *She, alas! knew why!*

Miss Rogers had done her best to persuade David Moore to take Bernardine away—to Europe—ay, to the furthest end of the world, where Jasper Wilde could not find them, declaring that she would raise the money to defray their traveling expenses.

David Moore shook his head.

"There is no part of the world to which we could go that he would not find us," he muttered, burying his face in his shaking hands. "But we will speak no more about it. It unmans me to think what would happen were——" and he stopped short.

He had often heard Miss Rogers make allusion to money she could lay her hand on at any moment; but the old basket-maker never believed her. He fancied that the poor woman had a sort of mania that she was possessed of means which she could lay her hand on at any moment, and all she said on the subject he considered as but visionary, and paid no attention to it whatever.

Poor Miss Rogers was in despair. What could she do to save Bernardine? She worried so over the matter that by evening she had so severe a headache that she was obliged to retire to her room and lie down.

David Moore had drunk himself into insensibility early in the evening, and Bernardine, sick at heart, alone, wretched, and desolate, was left by herself to look the dread future in the face.

The girl had reached a point where longer endurance was impossible. The man whom she loved had been only deceiving her with his protestations of affection;

he had laughed with his companions at the kisses he had bestowed on her sweet lips; and she abhorred the man who was to claim her on the morrow as the price of her father's liberty.

No wonder the world looked dark to the poor girl, and there seemed nothing in the future worth living for.

As the hours dragged by, Bernardine had made up her mind what to do.

The little clock on the mantel chimed the midnight hour as she arose from her low seat by the window, and putting on her hat, she glided from the wretched rooms that had been home to her all her dreary life.

Owing to the lateness of the hour, she encountered few people on the streets. There was no one to notice who she was or whither she went, save the old night-watchman who patroled the block.

"Poor child!" he muttered, thoughtfully, looking after the retreating figure; "she's going out to hunt for that drunken old scapegrace of a father, I'll warrant. It's dangerous for a fine young girl with a face like hers to be on the streets alone at this hour of the night. I've told the old basket-maker so scores of times, but somehow he does not seem to realize her great danger."

Bernardine drew down her dark veil, and waited until the people should go away. She was dressed in dark clothes, and sat so silently she attracted no particular attention; not even when she leaned over and looked longingly into the eddying waves.

Two or three ships bound for foreign ports were anchored scarcely fifty rods away. She could hear the songs and the laughter of the sailors. She waited until these sounds had subsided.

The girl sitting close in the shadow of one of the huge posts was not observed by the few stragglers strolling past.

One o'clock sounded from some far-off tower-clock; then the half hour struck.

Bernardine rose slowly to her feet, and looked back at the lights of the great city that she was leaving.

There would be no one to miss her; no one to weep over her untimely fate; no one to grieve that she had taken the fatal step to eternity.

Her father would be glad that there was no one to follow his step by night and by day, and plead with the wine-sellers to give him no more drink. He would rejoice that he could follow his own will, and drink as much as he pleased.

There was no dear old mother whose heart would break; no gentle sister or brother who would never forget her; no husband to mourn for her; no little child to hold out its hands to the blue sky, and cry to her to come back. No one would miss her on the face of God's earth.

Alas! for poor Bernardine, how little she knew that at that very hour the man whose love she craved most was wearing his very heart out for love of her.

Bernardine took but one hurried glance backward; then, with a sobbing cry, sprung over the pier, and into the dark, seething waters.

CHAPTER XXVII.

When Jay Gardiner left the city, he had expected to be gone a week, possibly a fortnight; but, owing to an unexpected turn in the business he was transacting, he was enabled to settle it in a day or so, and return to the city.

It was by the merest chance that he took passage by boat instead of going by rail; or, more truly speaking, there was a fate in it. The boat was due at the wharf by midnight; but, owing to an unaccountable delay, caused by the breaking of some machinery in the engine-room, it was after one o'clock when the steamer touched the wharf.

Doctor Gardiner was not in such a hurry as the rest of the passengers were, and he walked leisurely across the gang-plank, pausing, as he reached the pier, to look back at the lights on the water.

He felt just in the mood to pause there and enjoy what comfort he could find in a good cigar. He was just about to light a cigar, when his gaze was suddenly attracted toward a slender object—the figure of a woman sitting on the very edge of the pier.

She was in the shadow cast by a large post; but he knew from the position in which she sat, that she must be looking intently into the water.

He did not like the steady gaze with which she seemed to be looking downward, and the young doctor determined to watch her. He drew back into the shadow of one of the huge stanchions, and refrained from lighting his cigar.

If she would but change her dangerous position, he would call out to her; and he wondered where was the watchman who was supposed to guard those piers and prevent accidents of this kind.

While he was pondering over this matter, the figure rose suddenly to its feet, and he readily surmised from its slender, graceful build, which was but dimly outlined against the dark pier, that she must be a young girl.

What was she doing there at that unseemly hour? Watching for some sailor lover

whose ship was bearing him to her from over the great dark sea, or was she watching for a brother or father?

He had little time to speculate on this theme, however, for the next instant a piteous cry broke from the girl's lips—a cry in a voice strangely familiar; a cry that sent the blood bounding through his heart like an electric shock—and before he could take a step forward to prevent it, the slender figure had sprung over the pier.

By the time Jay Gardiner reached the edge of the dock, the dark waters had closed over her head, a few eddying ripples only marking the spot where she had gone down.

In an instant Doctor Gardiner tore off his coat and sprung into the water to the rescue. When he rose to the surface, looking eagerly about for the young girl whom he was risking his life to save, he saw a white face appear on the surface. He struck out toward it, but ere he reached the spot, it sunk. Again he dived, and yet again, a great fear oppressing him that his efforts would be in vain, when he saw the white face go down for the third and last time.

With a mighty effort Doctor Gardiner dove again. This time his hands struck something. He grasped it firmly. It was a tightly-clinched little hand.

Up through the water he bore the slender form, and struck out for the pier with his burden.

Doctor Gardiner was an expert swimmer, but it was with the utmost difficulty that he succeeded in reaching the pier, owing to the swell caused by the many steamboats passing. But it was accomplished at last, and almost on the verge of exhaustion himself, he succeeded in effecting a landing and laying his burden upon the pier.

"She is half drowned as it is," he muttered, bending closer to look at the pallid face under the flickering light of the gas-lamp.

As his eyes rested upon the girl's face, a mighty cry broke from his lips, and he staggered back as though a terrible blow had been dealt him.

"Great God! it is Bernardine!" he gasped.

The discovery fairly stunned him—took his breath away. Then he remembered that the girl was dying; that every instant of time was precious if he would save

her.

He worked over her as though his life were at stake, and his efforts were rewarded at last when the dark eyes opened languidly.

"Bernardine," he cried, kneeling beside her on the pier, his voice husky with emotion, "why did you do this terrible deed? Speak, my love, my darling!"

And almost before he was aware of it, he had clasped her to his heart, and was raining passionate kisses on the cheek, neck, and pale cold lips of the girl he loved better than life.

She did not seem to realize what had transpired; she did not recognize him.

"Do not take me home!" she sobbed, incoherently, over and over again. "Anywhere but there. He—he—will kill me!"

These words alarmed Doctor Gardiner greatly. What could they mean? He knew full well that this must have been the last thought that crossed her brain ere she took the fatal leap, or it would not have been the first one to flash across her mind with returning consciousness.

He saw, too, that she was getting into a delirium, and that she must be removed with all possible haste.

He did not know of Miss Rogers being in her home, and he reasoned with himself that there was no one to take care of her there, save the old basket-maker, and she could not have a worse companion in her present condition; therefore he must take her elsewhere.

Then it occurred to him that a very excellent nurse—a widow whom he had often recommended to his patients—must live very near that vicinity, and he determined to take her there, and then go after her father and bring him to her.

There was an old hack jostling by. Jay Gardiner hailed it, and placing Bernardine within, took a place by her side. In a few moments they were at their destination.

The old nurse was always expecting a summons to go to some patient; but she was quite dumbfounded to see who her caller was at that strange hour, and to see that he held an unconscious young girl in his arms.

Jay Gardiner explained the situation to the old nurse.

"I will not come again for a fortnight, nurse," he said, unsteadily, on leaving. "That will be best under the circumstances. She may be ill, but not in danger. I will send her father to her in the meantime."

"What an honorable man Jay Gardiner is!" thought the nurse, admiringly. "Not every man could have the strength of mind to keep away from the girl he loved, even if he was bound to another."

Doctor Gardiner dared not take even another glance at Bernardine, his heart was throbbing so madly, but turned and hurried from the house, and re-entering the cab, drove rapidly away.

He had planned to go directly to David Moore; but on second thought he concluded to wait until morning.

It would be a salutary lesson to the old basket-maker to miss Bernardine, and realize how much he depended upon the young girl for his happiness.

This was a fatal resolve for him to reach, as will be plainly seen.

As soon as he had finished his breakfast, he hurried to the Canal Street tenement house.

There was no commotion outside; evidently the neighbors had not heard of Bernardine's disappearance, and he doubted whether or not her father knew of it yet.

Jay Gardiner had barely stepped from the pavement into the dark and narrow hall-way ere he found himself face to face with Jasper Wilde.

The doctor would have passed him by with a haughty nod, but with one leap Wilde was at his side, his strong hands closing around his throat, while he cried out, in a voice fairly convulsed with passion:

"Aha! You have walked right into my net, and at the right moment. Where is Bernardine? She fled from me last night, and went directly to your arms, of course. Tell me where she is, that I may go to her and wreak my vengeance upon her! Answer me quickly, or I will kill you!"

Jay Gardiner was surprised for an instant; but it was only for an instant. In the next, he had recovered himself.

"You cur, to take a man at a disadvantage like that!" he cried; adding, as he

swung out his muscular right arm: "But as you have brought this upon yourself, I will give you enough of it!"

Two or three ringing blows showed Jasper Wilde, that, bully though he was, he had met his match in this white-handed aristocrat.

He drew back, uttering a peculiar sharp whistle, and two men, who were evidently in his employ, advanced quickly to Wilde's aid.

"Bind and gag this fellow!" he commanded, "and throw him down into the wine-cellar to await my coming! He's a thief. He has just stolen my pocket-book. Quick, my lads; don't listen to what he says!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Quick as a flash, Jasper Wilde's two men seized Jay Gardiner from behind and pinioned his arms, Wilde the while excitedly explaining something in German to them.

Doctor Gardiner, as we have explained, was an athletic young man. He could easily have disposed of Wilde, and probably a companion; but it is little wonder that the three men soon succeeded in overpowering him, while Wilde, with one awful blow, knocked him into insensibility ere he had time to refute the charge his antagonist had made against him.

"Take him to my private wine-cellar!" commanded Wilde, excitedly. "He's a fellow we've been trying to catch around here for some time. He's a thief, I tell you!"

The men obeyed their employer's command, little dreaming it was an innocent man they were consigning to a living tomb.

It was an hour afterward ere consciousness returned to Jay Gardiner. For a moment he was dazed, bewildered; then the recollection of the encounter, and the terrible blow he had received over the temple, recurred to him.

Where was he? The darkness and silence of death reigned. The air was musty. He lay upon a stone flagging through which the slime oozed.

Like a flash he remembered the words of Jasper Wilde.

"Take him to my private wine-cellar until I have time to attend to him."

Yes, that was where he must be—in Wilde's wine-cellar.

While he was cogitating over this scene, an iron door at the further end of the apartment opened, and a man, carrying a lantern, hastily entered the place, and stood on the threshold for a moment.

Doctor Gardiner saw at once that it was Jasper Wilde.

"Come to, have you?" cried Wilde, swinging the light in his face. "Well, how do you like your quarters, my handsome, aristocratic doctor, eh?"

"How dare you hold me a prisoner here?" demanded Jay Gardiner, striking the floor with his manacled hands. "Release me at once, I say!"

A sneering laugh broke from Wilde's thin lips.

"*Dare!*" he repeated, laying particular stress upon the word. "We Wildes dare anything when there is a pretty girl like beautiful Bernardine concerned in it."

"You scoundrel!" cried Jay Gardiner, "if I were but free from these shackles, I would teach you the lesson of your life!"

"A pinioned man is a fool to make threats," sneered Wilde. "But come, now. Out with it, curse you! Where is Bernardine?—where have you hidden her?"

"I refuse to answer your question," replied Jay Gardiner, coolly. "I know where she is, but that knowledge shall never be imparted to you without her consent."

"I will wring it from your lips, curse you!" cried Wilde, furiously. "I will torture you here, starve you here, until you go mad and are glad to speak."

"Even though you *kill* me, you shall not learn from my lips the whereabouts of Bernardine Moore!" exclaimed Jay Gardiner, hoarsely.

As the hours dragged their slow lengths by, exhausted nature asserted itself, and despite the hunger and burning thirst he endured, and the pain in his head, sleep —

> "Tired Nature's sweet restorer—balmy sleep"—

came to him.

Suddenly the door opened, and Jasper Wilde, still carrying a lantern, looked in.

"It is morning again," he said. "How have you passed the night, my handsome doctor? I see the rodents have not eaten you. I shouldn't have been the least surprised if they had. I assure you, I wonder they could have abstained from such a feast."

"You fiend incarnate!" cried Jay Gardiner, hoarsely. "Remove these shackles, and meet me as man to man. Only a dastardly coward bullies a man who can not

help himself."

"Still defiant, my charming doctor!" laughed Wilde. "I marvel at that. I supposed by this time you would be quite willing to give me the information I desired."

Jay Gardiner could not trust himself to speak, his indignation was so great.

"*Au revoir* again," sneered Wilde. "The day will pass and the night will follow, in the natural course of events. To-morrow, at this hour, I shall look in on you again, my handsome doctor. Look out for the rodents. Bless me! they are dashing over the floor. I must fly!"

Again the door closed, and with a groan Jay Gardiner could not repress, he sunk to the floor, smiting it with his manacled hands, and wondering how soon this awful torture would end.

CHAPTER XXIX.

During the long hours of the night which followed, Jay Gardiner dared not trust himself to sleep for a single instant, so great was his horror of the rodents that scampered in droves across the damp floor of the cellar in which he was a prisoner.

He felt that his brain must soon give way, and that Jasper Wilde would have his desire—he would soon be driven to insanity.

He thought of Bernardine, who was waiting for him to return to her, and he groaned aloud in the bitterness of his anguish, in the agony of his awful despair.

The manacles cut into his flesh, for his wrists had swollen as he lay there, and the burning thirst was becoming maddening.

"Great God in Heaven! how long—ah, how long, will this torture last?" he cried.

In the midst of his anguish, he heard footsteps; but not those for which he longed so ardently. A moment later, and Jasper Wilde stood before him.

"Now let me tell you what my revenge upon the beautiful Bernardine will be for preferring *you* to myself. I shall marry her—she dare not refuse when I have her here—that I warrant you. As I said before, I shall marry the dainty Bernardine, the cold, beautiful, haughty Bernardine, and then I shall force her to go behind the bar, and the beauty of her face will draw custom from far and near.

"Nothing could be so revolting to her as this. It will crush her, it will kill her, and I, whose love for her has turned into hate—yes, deepest, deadly hate—will stand by and watch her, and laugh at her. Ha! ha! ha!"

With a fury born of madness, Doctor Gardiner wrenched himself free from the chains that bound him, and with one flying leap was upon his enemy and had hurled him to the floor, his hand clutching Wilde's throat.

"It shall be death to one or other of us!" he panted, hoarsely.

But he had not reckoned that in his weak condition he was no match for Jasper Wilde, who for the moment was taken aback by the suddenness of the attack.

That the encounter would have ended in certain death to Jay Gardiner, in his exhausted state, was quite apparent to Jasper Wilde; but in that moment fate intervened to save him. Hardly had the two men come together in that desperate death-struggle, ere the startling cry of "Fire!" rang through the building.

Jasper Wilde realized what that meant. There was but one exit from the cellar, and if he did not get out of it in a moment's time, he would be caught like a rat in a trap. Gathering himself together, he wrenched himself free from the doctor's grasp, and hurling him to the floor with a fearful blow planted directly between the eyes, sprung over the threshold.

Wilde paused a single instant to shout back:

"I leave you to your fate, my handsome doctor! Ha! ha! ha!"

But fate did not intend Jay Gardiner to die just then, even though he sunk back upon the flags with an awful groan and fully realized the horror of the situation.

That groan saved him. A fireman heard it, and in less time than it takes to tell it, a brawny, heroic fellow sprung through the iron door-way, which Wilde in his mad haste had not taken time to close.

A moment more, and the fireman had carried his burden up through the flames, and out into the pure air.

The fresh air revived the young doctor, as nothing else could have done.

"Give me your name and address," he said, faintly, to the fireman. "You shall hear from me again;" and the man good-naturedly complied, and then turned back the next instant to his duty.

In the excitement, he forgot to ask whose life it was he had saved.

The fire proved to be a fearful holocaust. Canal Street had never known a conflagration that equaled it.

Doctor Gardiner made superhuman efforts to enter the tenement-house, to save the life of the old basket-maker—Bernardine's hapless father—who stood

paralyzed, incapable of action, at an upper window. But no human being could breast that sea of flame; and with a cry of horror, the young doctor saw the tenement collapse, and David Moore was buried in the ruins.

He had forfeited his life for the brandy he had taken just a little while before, which utterly unfitted him to make an effort to get out of the building.

Jay Gardiner, sick at heart, turned away with a groan. He must go to Bernardine at once; but, Heaven help her! how could he break the news of her great loss to her?

As he was deliberating on what course to pursue, a hand was suddenly laid on his shoulder, and a voice said, lustily:

"By all that is wonderful, I can scarcely believe my eyes, Jay Gardiner, that this is you! I expected you were at this moment hundred of miles away from New York. But, heavens! how ill you look! Your clothes are covered with dust. What can be the matter with you, Jay?"

Turning suddenly at the sound of the familiar voice, Doctor Gardiner found himself face to face with the young physician who took charge of his office while he was away.

"Come with me; you shall not tell me now, nor talk. Come to the office, and let me fix up something for you, or you will have a spell of sickness."

And without waiting to heed Jay Gardiner's expostulations—that he must go somewhere else first—he called a passing cab, and hustled him into it.

Owing to his splendid physique, he felt quite as good as new the next morning, save for the pain in his head, where he had fallen upon the stone flagging of the wine cellar.

Without any more loss of time than was absolutely necessary, he set out for the old nurse's house, at which he had left Bernardine two days before. He had half expected to find her ill, and he was not a little surprised when she came to the door in answer to his summons.

"Mrs. Gray is out," she said, "and I saw you coming, Doctor Gardiner, and oh, I could not get here quick enough to see you and thank you for what you have done for me—risked your own life to save a worthless one like mine."

"Hush, hush, Bernardine! You must not say that!" he cried, seizing her little hands.

He drew her into the plain little sitting-room, seated her, then turned from her abruptly and commenced pacing up and down the room, his features working convulsively.

It was by the greatest effort he had restrained himself from clasping her in his arms. Only Heaven knew how great was the effort.

"Why did you attempt to drown yourself, Bernardine?" he asked, at length. "Tell me the truth."

"Yes, I will tell you," sobbed Bernardine, piteously. "I did it because I did not wish to become Jasper Wilde's bride."

"But why were you driven to such a step?" he persisted. "Surely you could have said 'No,' and that would have been sufficient."

For a moment she hesitated, then she flung herself, sobbing piteously, on her knees at his feet.

"If I tell you *all*, will you pledge yourself to keep my secret, and my father's secret, come what may?" she cried, wringing her hands.

"Yes," he replied, solemnly. "I shall never divulge what you tell me. You can speak freely, Bernardine."

And Bernardine *did* speak freely. She told him all without reserve—of the sword Jasper Wilde held over her head because of her poor father, whom he could send to the gallows, although he was an innocent man, if she refused to marry him.

Jay Gardiner listened to every word with intense interest.

"While I have been here I have been thinking—thinking," she sobbed. "Oh, it was cruel of me to try to avoid my duty to poor father. I must go back and—and marry Jasper Wilde, to save poor papa, who must now be half-crazed by my disappearance."

Doctor Gardiner clasped her little hands still closer. The time had come when he must break the awful news to her that her father was no longer in Jasper Wilde's power; that he had passed beyond all fear of him, all fear of punishment at the hand of man.

"Are you strong enough to bear a great shock, Bernardine?" he whispered, involuntarily gathering the slender figure to him.

The girl grew pale as death.

"Is it something about father? Has anything happened to him?" she faltered, catching her breath.

He nodded his head; then slowly, very gently, he told her of the fire, and that he had seen her father perish—that he was now forever beyond Jasper Wilde's power.

Poor Bernardine listened like one turned to stone: then, without a word or a cry, fell at his feet in a faint.

At that opportune moment the old nurse returned.

Doctor Gardiner soon restored her to consciousness; but it made his heart bleed to witness her intense grief. She begged him to take her to the ruins, and with great reluctance he consented.

Ordering a cab at the nearest stand, he placed her in it, and took a seat by her side, feeling a vague uneasiness, a consciousness that this ride should never have been taken.

She was trembling like a leaf. What could he do but place his strong arm about her? In that moment, in the happiness of being near her, he forgot that he was in honor bound to another, and that other Sally Pendleton, whom he was so soon to lead to the altar to make his wife.

The girl he loved with all the strength of his heart was so near to him—ah, Heaven! so dangerously near—the breath from her lips was wafted to him with each passing breeze, and seemed to steal his very senses from him.

Oh, if he could but indulge in one moment of happiness—could clasp her in his arms but a single moment, and kiss those trembling lips just once, he would be willing to pay for it by a whole life-time of sorrow, he told himself.

Ah! why must he refuse himself so resolutely this one draught of pleasure that fate had cast in his way?

He hesitated, and we all know what happens to the man who hesitates—he is lost.

At this moment Bernardine turned to him, sobbing piteously:

"Oh, what shall I do, Doctor Gardiner? Father's death leaves me all alone in the world—all alone, with no one to love me!"

In an instant he forgot prudence, restraint; he only knew that his heart, ay, his very soul, flowed out to her in a torrent so intense no human will could have restrained it.

Almost before he was aware of it, his arms were about her, straining her to his madly beating heart, his passionate kisses falling thrillingly upon her beautiful hair and the sweet, tender lips, while he cried, hoarsely:

"You shall never say that again, beautiful Bernardine! *I* love you—yes, I love you with all my heart and soul! Oh, darling! answer me—do you care for me?"

The girl recoiled from him with a low, wailing sob. The words of the fashionably attired young girl who had called upon her so mysteriously on that never-to-be-forgotten day, and taunted her with—"He is deceiving you, girl! Doctor Gardiner may talk to you of love, but he will never—never speak to you of marriage. Mark my words!"—were ringing like a death-knell in her ears.

"Oh, Bernardine!" he cried, throwing prudence to the winds, forgetting in that moment everything save his mad love for her—"oh, my darling! you are *not* alone in the world! *I* love you! Marry me, Bernardine, and save me from the future spreading out darkly before me—marry me within the hour—*now*! Don't refuse me. We are near a church now. The rector lives next door. We will alight here, and in five minutes you will be all my own to comfort, to care for, to protect and idolize, to worship as I would an angel from Heaven!"

He scarcely waited for her to consent. He stopped the coach, and fairly lifted her from the vehicle in his strong arms.

"Oh, Doctor Gardiner, is it for the best?" she cried, clinging to him with death-cold hands. "Are you *sure* you want me?"

The answer that he gave her, as he bent his fair, handsome head, must have satisfied her. Loving him as she did, how could she say him nay?

They entered the parsonage, and when they emerged from it, ten minutes later, Bernardine was Jay Gardiner's wedded wife.

And that was the beginning of the tragedy.

"I shall not take you to the scene of the fire just now, my darling," he decided. "The sight would be too much for you. In a day or two, when you have become more reconciled to your great loss, I will take you there."

"You know best, Doctor Gardiner," she sobbed, as they re-entered the vehicle. "I will do whatever you think is best."

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver, touching his cap.

"We will go to Central Park," he answered; then turning to Bernardine, he added: "When we reach there, we will alight and dismiss this man. We will sit down on one of the benches, talk matters over, and decide what is best to be done—where you would like to go for your wedding-trip; but, my love, my sweetheart, my life, you must not call me 'Doctor Gardiner.' To you, from this time on, I am Jay, your own fond husband!"

CHAPTER XXX.

Jay Gardiner had taken fate in his own hands. He had married the girl he loved, casting aside every barrier that lay between them, even to facing the wrath, and, perhaps, the world's censure in deserting the girl to whom he was betrothed, but whom he did not love.

He was deeply absorbed in thinking about this as the cab stopped at the park entrance.

"Come, my darling!" exclaimed Jay, kissing fondly the beautiful face upturned to him, "we will alight and talk over our plans for the future."

She clung to him, as he with tender care, lifted her from the vehicle.

He was her husband, this grand, kingly, fair-haired man, at whom the women passing looked so admiringly. She could hardly realize it, hardly dare believe it, but for the fact that he was calling her his darling bride with every other breath.

He found her a seat beneath a wide-spreading tree, where the greensward was like velvet beneath their feet, and the air was redolent with the scent of flowers that rioted in the sunshine hard by.

"Now, first of all, my precious Bernardine, we must turn our thoughts in a practical direction long enough to select which hotel we are to go to; and another quite as important matter, your wardrobe, you know."

Bernardine looked up at him gravely.

"This dress will do for the present," she declared. "The good, kind old nurse dried and pressed it out so nicely for me that it looks almost as good as new. And as for going to a hotel, I am sure it is too expensive. We could go to a boarding-house where the charges would be moderate."

Jay Gardiner threw back his handsome head, and laughed so loud and so heartily that Bernardine looked at him anxiously.

"Now that I come to think the matter over, I don't think I ever told you much concerning my financial affairs," he said, smiling.

"No; but papa guessed about them," replied Bernardine.

"Tell me what he guessed?" queried Jay. "He thought I was poor?"

"Yes," replied Bernardine, frankly. "He said that all doctors had a very hard time of it when they started in to build up a practice, and that you must be having a very trying experience to make both ends meet."

"Was that why he did not want me for a son-in-law?"

"Yes, I think so," admitted Bernardine, blushing.

"Tell me this, my darling," he said, eagerly catching at the pretty little hands lying folded in her lap; "why is it that *you* have waived all that, that you have married me, not knowing whether I had enough to pay for a day's lodging?"

The most beautiful light that ever was seen flashed into the tender dark eyes, a smile curved the red lips that set all the pretty dimples dancing in the round, flushed cheeks.

"I married you because——" and then she hesitated shyly.

"Go on, Bernardine," he persisted; "you married me because——"

"Because I—I loved you," she whispered, her lovely face fairly covered with blushes.

"Now, the first thing to do, sweetheart, is to call a cab, that you may go to the nearest large dry-goods store and make such purchases as you may need for immediate use. I can occupy the time better than standing about looking at you. I will leave you at the store, and have the cabby drive me around to the old nurse and explain what has occurred, and tell her that you won't come back. Then I can attend to another little matter or two, and return for you in an hour's time. And last, but not least, take this pocket-book—I always carry two about me—and use freely its contents. The purse, and what is in it, are yours, sweet!"

"Oh, I couldn't think of taking so much money!" declared Bernardine, amazed at the bulky appearance of the pocket-book at the first glance.

Jay Gardiner laughed good-naturedly.

"You shall have everything your heart desires, my precious one," he declared. "Don't worry about the price of anything you want; buy it, and I shall be only too pleased, believe me."

There was no time to say anything further, for the store was reached, and Jay had barely time to snatch a kiss from the beautiful lips ere he handed her out.

"I will return in just an hour from now, Bernardine, with this cab," he said. "If you are not then at the door, looking for me, I shall wait here patiently until you do come out."

"How good you are to me!" murmured the girl, her dark eyes brimming over with tears. "If papa could only know!"

"There, there now, my darling, it hurts me to see those eyes shed tears! The past is past. Your father would be glad to know you have a protector to love and care for you. Try to forget, as much as you can, the sad calamity, for *my* sake."

And with another pressure of the hands, he turned away and sprung into the cab, watching the slender form from the window until it disappeared in the door-way and was lost to sight.

"Love thrust honor and duty aside," he murmured. "I married sweet Bernardine on the impulse of the moment, and I shall never regret it. I will have a time with Sally Pendleton and her relatives; but the interview will be a short one. She has other admirers, and she will soon console herself. It was my money, instead of myself, that she wanted, anyhow, so there is no damage done to her heart, thank goodness. I will——"

The rest of the sentence was never finished. There was a frightful crash, mingled with the terrific ringing of car-bells, a violent plunge forward, and Jay Gardiner knew no more.

With a thoughtful face, Bernardine walked quickly into the great dry-goods store.

She tried to do her husband's bidding—-put all thoughts of it from her for the time being—until she could weep over it calmly, instead of giving way to the violent, pent-up anguish throbbing in her heart at that moment.

She had not been accustomed to spending much money during her young life. The very few dresses she had had done duty for several years, by being newly

made over, sponged, and pressed, and freshened by a ribbon here, or a bit of lace there. So it did not take long to make the few purchases she deemed necessary, and even then she felt alarmed in finding that they footed up to nearly seven dollars, which appeared a great sum to her.

Six o'clock now struck, and the clerks hustled away the goods en the counters, and covered those on the shelves with surprising agility, much to the annoyance of many belated customers who had come in too late "to just look around and get samples."

To the surprise of the clerks, as they reached the sidewalk from a side entrance of the building, they saw the beautiful young girl still standing in front of the store with the parcel in her hand and a look of bewilderment on her face.

"It is a little after six," murmured Bernardine, glancing up at a clock in an adjacent store. "He has not yet returned, but he will be here soon. I do not wonder that the driver of the cab he is in can make but little headway, the crowds on the street and crossings are so great."

One cab after another whirled by, their occupants in many instances looking back to catch another glimpse of that perfect face with its wistful expression which had turned toward them so eagerly and then turned away so disappointedly.

"A shop girl waiting for some fellow who is to come in a cab and take her out to supper," remarked two dudes who were sauntering up Broadway.

Bernardine heard the remark, and flushed indignantly.

How she wished she dared tell them that she was waiting for her husband! Yes, she was waiting—waiting, but he came not.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The sun dipped low in the West; the great crowds hurrying hither and thither were beginning to thin out. New York's busy throngs were seeking their homes to enjoy the meal which they had worked for in factory and shop, for they were mostly working people who composed this seething mass of humanity.

Slowly time dragged on. Seven o'clock tolled from a far-off belfry. Bernardine was getting frightfully nervous.

What could have happened to her handsome young husband, who had left her with the promise that he would return within the hour?

The policeman pacing to and fro on that beat watched her curiously each time he passed.

Eight o'clock struck slowly and sharply. The wind had risen, and was now howling like a demon around the corners of the great buildings.

"What shall I do? Oh, Heaven, help me! what shall I do?" sobbed Bernardine, in nervous affright. "He—he must have forgotten me."

At that moment a hand fell heavily on her shoulder.

Looking up hastily through her tears, Bernardine saw a policeman standing before her and eyeing her sharply.

"What are you doing here, my good girl?" he asked. "Waiting for somebody? I would advise you to move on. We're going to have a storm, and pretty quick, too, and I judge that it will be a right heavy one."

"I—I am waiting for my husband," faltered Bernardine. "He drove me here in a cab. I was to do a little shopping while he went to find a boarding-house. He was to return in an hour—-by six o'clock. I—I have been waiting here since that time, and—and he has not come."

"Hum! Where did you and your husband live last?" inquired the man of the brass

buttons.

"We—we didn't live anywhere before. We—we were just married to-day," admitted the girl, her lovely face suffused with blushes.

"The old story," muttered the officer under his breath. "Some rascal has deluded this simple, unsophisticated girl into the belief that he has married her, then cast her adrift."

"I am going to tell you what I think, little girl," he said, speaking kindly in his bluff way. "But don't cry out, make a scene, or get hysterical. It's my opinion that the man you are waiting for don't intend to come back."

He saw the words strike her as lightning strikes and blasts a fair flower. A terrible shiver ran through the young girl, then she stood still, as though turned to stone, her face overspread with the pallor of death.

The policeman was used to all phases of human nature. He saw that this girl's grief was genuine, and felt sorry for her.

"Surely you have a home, friends, here somewhere?" he asked.

Bernardine shook her head, sobbing piteously.

"I lived in the tenement house on Canal Street that has just been burned down. My father perished in it, leaving me alone in the world—homeless, shelterless—and—and this man asked me to marry him, and—and I—did."

The policeman was convinced more than ever by her story that some *roué* had taken advantage of the girl's pitiful situation to lead her astray.

"That's bad. But surely you have friends *somewhere*?"

Again Bernardine shook her head, replying, forlornly:

"Not one on earth. Papa and I lived only for each other."

The policeman looked down thoughtfully for a moment. He said to himself that he ought to try to save her from the fate which he was certain lay before her.

"I suppose he left you without a cent, the scoundrel?" he queried, brusquely.

"Oh, don't speak of him harshly!" cried Bernardine, distressedly. "I am sure something has happened to prevent his coming. He left his pocket-book with me,

and there is considerable money in it."

"Ah! the scoundrel had a little more heart than I gave him credit for," thought the policeman.

He did not take the trouble to ask the name of the man whom she believed had wedded her, being certain that he had given a fictitious one to her.

"There is a boarding-house just two blocks from here, that I would advise you to go to for the night, at least, young lady," he said, "and if he comes I will send him around there. I can not miss him if he comes, for I will be on this beat, pacing up and down, until seven o'clock to-morrow morning. See, the rain has commenced to come down pretty hard. Come!"

There was nothing else to do but accept the kind policeman's suggestion. As it was, by the time she reached the house to which he good-naturedly piloted her, the fierce storm was raging in earnest.

He spoke a few words, which Bernardine could not catch, to the white-haired, benevolent-looking lady who opened the door.

She turned to the girl with outstretched hands.

"Come right in, my dear," she said, gently; "come right in."

"I was waiting for my husband, but somehow I missed him," explained Bernardine. "The policeman will be sure to run across him and send him around here."

The lady looked pityingly at the beautiful young face—a look that made Bernardine a little nervous, though there was nothing but gentleness and kindness in it.

"We will talk about that in the morning," she said. "I will show you to a room. The house is quite full just now, and I shall have to put you in a room with another young girl. Pardon the question, but have you had your supper?"

"No," replied Bernardine, frankly, "and I am hungry and fatigued."

"I will send you up a bowl of bread and milk, and a cup of nice hot tea," said the lady.

"How good you are to me, a perfect stranger!" murmured Bernardine. "I will be

glad to pay you for the tea and——"

The lady held up her white hand with a slow gesture.

"We do not take pay for any services we render here, my dear," she said. "This is a young girls' temporary shelter, kept up by a few of the very wealthy women in this great city."

Bernardine was very much surprised to hear this; but before she could reply, the lady threw open a door to the right, and Bernardine was ushered into a plain but scrupulously neat apartment in which sat a young girl of apparently her own age.

"Sleep here in peace, comfort and security," said the lady. "I will have a talk with you on the morrow," and she closed the door softly, leaving Bernardine alone with the young girl at the window, who had faced about and was regarding her eagerly.

"I am awfully glad you are come," she broke in quickly; "it was terribly slow occupying this room all alone, as I told the matron awhile ago. It seems she took pity on me and sent you here. But why don't you sit down, girl? You look at me as though you were not particularly struck with my face, and took a dislike to me at first sight, as most people do."

She was correct in her surmise. Bernardine *had* taken a dislike to her, she scarcely knew why.

Bernardine forgot her own trials and anxiety in listening to the sorrowful story of this hapless creature.

"Why don't you try to find work in some other factory or some shop?" asked Bernardine, earnestly.

"My clothes are so shabby, my appearance is against me. No one wants to employ a girl whose dress is all tatters."

A sudden thought came to Bernardine, and she acted on the impulse.

"Here," she said, pulling out her pocket-book—"here is ten dollars. Get a dress, and try to find work. The money is not a loan; it is a gift."

The girl had hardly heard the words, ere a cry of amazement fell from her lips. She was eyeing the well-filled pocket-book with a burning gaze.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The girl took the money which Bernardine handed to her, her eyes following every movement of the white hand that placed the wallet back in her pocket.

"You must be rich to have so much money about you," she said, slowly, with a laugh that grated harshly on Bernardine's sensitive ears.

"It is not mine," said Bernardine, simply; "it is my husband's, and represents all the years of toil he has worked, and all the rigid economy he has practiced."

The girl looked at her keenly. Could it be that she was simple enough to believe that the man who had deserted her so cruelly had *married* her? Well, let her believe what she chose, it was no business of hers.

The bowl of bread and milk and the cup of tea were sent up to Bernardine, and she disposed of them with a heartiness that amused her companion.

"I am afraid you will not sleep well after eating so late," she said, with a great deal of anxiety in her voice.

"I shall rest all the better for taking the hot milk. I fall asleep generally as soon as my head touches the pillow, and I do not wake until the next morning. Why, if the house tumbled down around me, I believe that I would not know it. I will remove my jacket, to keep it from wrinkling."

This information seemed to please her companion. She breathed a sigh of relief, and an ominous glitter crept into her small black eyes.

"But I do not want to go to sleep to-night," added Bernardine in the next breath. "I shall sit by the window, with my face pressed against the pane, watching for my—my husband."

Her companion, who had introduced herself as Margery Brown, cried out hastily:

"Don't do that. You will look like a washed-out, wilted flower by to-morrow, if

you do, and your—your husband won't like that. Men only care for women when they are fresh and fair. Go to bed, and I will sit up and watch for you, and wake you when he comes; though it's my opinion he won't come until to-morrow, for fear of disturbing you."

But Bernardine was firm in her resolve.

"He may come any minute," she persisted, drawing her chair close to the window, and peering wistfully out into the storm.

But a tired feeling, caused by the great excitement She had undergone that day, at length began to tell upon her, and her eyes drooped wearily in spite of her every effort to keep them open, and at last, little by little, they closed, and the long, dark, curling lashes, heavy with unshed tears, lay still upon the delicately rounded cheeks.

Margery Brown bent forward, watching her eagerly.

"Asleep at last," she muttered, rising from her seat and crossing the room with a stealthy, cat-like movement, until she reached Bernardine's side.

Bending over her, she laid her hand lightly on her shoulder.

Bernardine stirred uneasily, muttering something in her, sleep about "loving him so fondly," the last of the sentence ending in a troubled sigh.

"They used to tell me that I had the strange gift of being able to mesmerize people," she muttered. "We will see if I can do it *now*. I'll try it."

Standing before Bernardine, she made several passes with her hands before the closed eyelids. They trembled slightly, but did not open. Again and again those hands waved to and fro before Bernardine with the slowness and regularity of a pendulum.

"Ah, ha!" she muttered at length under her breath, "she sleeps sound enough now."

She laid her hand heavily on Bernardine's breast. The gentle breathing did not abate, and with a slow movement the hand slid down to the pocket of her dress, fumbled about the folds for a moment, then reappeared, tightly clutching the well-filled wallet.

"You can sleep on as comfortably as you like now, my innocent little fool!" she

muttered. "Good-night, and good-bye to you."

Hastily donning Bernardine's jacket and hat, the girl stole noiselessly from the room, closing the door softly after her.

So exhausted was Bernardine, she did not awaken until the sunshine, drifting into her face in a flood of golden light, forced the long black lashes to open.

For an instant she was bewildered as she sat up in her chair, looking about the small white room; but in a moment she remembered all that had transpired.

She saw that she was the sole occupant of the apartment, and concluded her room-mate must have gone to breakfast; but simultaneously with this discovery, she saw that her jacket and hat were missing.

She was mystified at first, loath to believe that her companion could have appropriated them, and left the torn and ragged articles she saw hanging in their place.

As she arose from her chair, she discovered that her pocket was hanging inside out, and that the pocket-book was gone!

For an instant she was fairly paralyzed. Then the white lips broke into a scream that brought the matron, who was just passing the door, quickly to her side.

In a hysterical voice, quite as soon as she could command herself to articulate the words, she told the good woman what had happened.

The matron listened attentively.

"I never dreamed that you had money about you my poor child," she said, "or I would have suggested your leaving it with me. I worried afterward about putting you in this room with Margaret Brown; but we were full, and there was no help for it. That is her great fault. She is not honest. We knew that, but when she appealed to me for a night's lodging, I could not turn her away. The front door is never locked, and those who come here can leave when they like. We found it standing open this morning, and we felt something was wrong."

But Bernardine did not hear the last of the sentence. With a cry she fell to the floor at the matron's feet in a death-like swoon.

Kind hands raised her, placed her on the couch, and administered to her; but when at length the dark eyes opened, there was no glance of recognition in them,

and the matron knew, even before she called the doctor, that she had a case of brain fever before her.

This indeed proved to be a fact, and it was many a long week ere a knowledge of events transpiring around her came to Bernardine.

During the interim, dear reader, we will follow the fortunes of Jay Gardiner, the young husband for whom Bernardine had watched and waited in vain.

When he was picked up unconscious after the collision, he was recognized by some of the passengers and conveyed to his own office.

It seemed that he had sustained a serious scalp-wound and the doctors who had been called in consultation looked anxiously into each other's faces.

"A delicate operation will be necessary," said the most experienced physician, "and whether it will result in life or death, I can not say."

They recommended that his relatives, if he had any, be sent for. It was soon ascertained that his mother and sister were in Europe, traveling about the Continent. The next person equally, if indeed not more interested, was the young lady he was betrothed to marry—Miss Pendleton. Accordingly, she was sent for with all possible haste.

A servant bearing a message for Sally entered the room.

The girl's hands trembled. She tore the envelope open quickly, and as her eyes traveled over the contents of the note, she gave a loud scream.

"Jay Gardiner has met with an accident, and I am sent for. Ah! that is why I have not heard from him for a week, mamma!" she exclaimed, excitedly.

"I will go with you, my dear," declared her mother. "It wouldn't be proper for you to go alone. Make your toilet at once."

To the messenger's annoyance, the young lady he was sent for kept him waiting nearly an hour, and he was startled, a little later, to see the vision of blonde loveliness that came hurrying down the broad stone steps in the wake of her mother.

"Beautiful, but she has no heart," was his mental opinion. "Very few girls would

have waited an hour, knowing their lover lay at the point of death. But it's none of my business, though I *do* wish noble young Doctor Gardiner had made a better selection for a wife."

The cab whirled rapidly on, and soon reached Doctor Gardiner's office.

Sally looked a little frightened, and turned pale under her rouge when she saw the group of grave-faced physicians evidently awaiting her arrival.

"Our patient has recovered consciousness," said one of them, taking her by the hand and leading her forward. "He is begging pitifully to see some one—of course, it must be yourself—some one who is waiting for him."

"Of course," repeated Sally. "There is no one he would be so interested in seeing as myself."

And quite alone, she entered the inner apartment where Jay Gardiner lay hovering between life and death.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The room into which Sally Pendleton was ushered was so dimly lighted that she was obliged to take the second glance about ere she could distinguish where the couch was on which Jay Gardiner lay. The next moment she was bending over him, crying and lamenting so loudly that the doctors waiting outside were obliged to go to her and tell her that this outburst might prove fatal to their patient in that critical hour.

Jay Gardiner was looking up at her with dazed eyes. He recognized her, uttered her name.

"Was it to-night that I left your house, after settling when the marriage was to take place?" he asked.

Miss Pendleton humored the idea by answering "Yes," instead of telling him that the visit he referred to had taken place several weeks before.

"To-day was to have been our wedding-day," she sobbed, "and now you are ill—very ill. But, Jay," she whispered, bending down and uttering the words rapidly in his ear, "it could take place just the same, here and now, if you are willing. I sent a note to a minister to come here, and he may arrive at any moment. When he comes, shall I speak to him about it?"

He did not answer; he was trying to remember something, trying, oh, so hard, to remember something that lay like a weight on his mind.

Heaven help him! the past was entirely blotted out of his memory!

He recollected leaving Miss Pendleton's house after setting the date for his marriage with her, but beyond that evening the world was a blank to him.

He never remembered that there were such people as David Moore, the basket-maker, and a beautiful girl, his daughter Bernardine, to whom he had lost his heart, and whom he had wedded, and that she was now waiting for him. His mind was to be a blank upon all that for many a day to come.

"What do you say, Jay?" repeated Miss Pendleton; "will not the ceremony take place to-day, as we had intended?"

"They tell me I am very ill, Sally," he whispered. "I—I may be dying. Do you wish the ceremony to take place in the face of that fact?"

"Yes," she persisted. "I want you to keep your solemn vow that you would make me your wife; and—and delays are dangerous."

"Then it shall be as you wish," he murmured, faintly, in an almost inaudible voice, the effort to speak being so great as to cause him to almost lose consciousness.

Sally stepped quickly from Jay's beside out into the adjoining room.

"Mr. Gardiner wishes our marriage to take place here and now," she announced. "A minister will be here directly. When he arrives, please show him to Doctor Gardiner's bedside."

Mamma Pendleton smiled and nodded her approval in a magnificent way as she caught her daughter's eye for a second. The doctors looked at one another in alarm.

"I do not see how it can take place just now, Miss Pendleton," said one, quietly. "We have a very dangerous and difficult operation to perform upon your betrothed, and each moment it is delayed reduces his chance of recovery. We must put him under chloroform without an instant's delay."

"And I say that it shall not be done until after the marriage ceremony has been performed," declared Sally, furiously; adding, spitefully: "You want to cheat me out of becoming Jay Gardiner's wife. But I defy you! you can not do it! He *shall* marry me, in spite of you all!"

At that moment there was a commotion outside. The minister had arrived.

Sally herself rushed forward to meet him ere the doctors could have an opportunity to exchange a word with him, and conducted him at once to the sick man's bedside, explaining that her lover had met with an accident, and that he wished to be married to her without a moment's delay.

"I shall be only too pleased to serve you both," replied the good man.

"You must make haste, sir," urged Miss Pendleton sharply. "See, he is beginning

to sink."

The minister did make haste. Never before were those solemn words so rapidly uttered.

How strange it was that fate should have let that ceremony go on to the end which would spread ruin and desolation before it!

The last words were uttered. The minister of God slowly but solemnly pronounced Sally Pendleton Jay Gardiner's lawfully wedded wife.

The doctors did not congratulate the bride, but sprung to the assistance of the young physician, who had fallen back upon his pillow gasping for breath.

One held a sponge saturated with a strong liquid to his nostrils, while another escorted the minister, the bride, and her mother from the apartment.

"Remain in this room as quietly as possible," urged the doctor, in a whisper, "and I will let you know at the earliest possible moment whether it will be life or death with your husband, Mrs. Gardiner."

At last the door quickly opened, and two of the doctors stood on the threshold.

"Well, doctor," she cried, looking from one to the other, "what tidings do you bring me? Am I a wife or a widow?"

"Five minutes' time will decide that question, madame," said one, impressively. "We have performed the operation. It rests with a Higher Power whether it will be life or death."

And the doctor who had spoken took out his watch, and stood motionless as a statue while it ticked off the fatal minutes.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Sally Pendleton and her mother watched their faces keenly.

The time is up. They open the inner door reluctantly. The two doctors, bending over their patient, look up with a smile.

"The heart still beats," they whisper. "He will live."

And this is the intelligence that is carried out to the young bride, the words breaking in upon her in the midst of her selfish calculations.

She did not love Jay Gardiner. Any genuine passion in her breast had been coolly nipped in the bud by his indifference, which had stung her to the quick.

She could not make him jealous. She knew that he would have been only too relieved if she had fallen in love with some one else, and had been taken off his hands.

He always treated her in a cool, lordly manner—a manner that always impressed her with his superiority. She was obliged to acknowledge him her master; she could never make him her slave.

And now he was to live, and she was his wife. She would share his magnificent home, all the grandeur that his position would bring to her. She had been brought up to regard money as the one aim of existence. Money she must have. She coveted power, and she was girl of the world enough to know that money meant power.

"Yes, he will live; but whether he will gain his full reasoning powers is a matter the future alone can decide," the doctors declare.

Two long months, and Doctor Gardiner is slowly convalescing. His young wife flits about the room, a veritable dream in her dainty lace-trimmed house-gowns, baby pink ribbons tying back her yellow curls. But he looks away from her toward the window with a weary sigh.

He has married her, and he tells himself over and over again, that he must make the best of it. But "making the best of it" is indeed a bitter pill, for she is not his style of woman.

During the time he has been convalescing, he has been studying her, and as one trait after another unfolds itself, he wonders how it will all end.

He sees she has a passionate craving for the admiration of men. She makes careful toilets in which to receive his friends when they call to inquire after his health; and last, but not least, she has taken to the wheel, and actually appears before him in bloomers.

What would his haughty old mother and his austere sister say when they learned this?

There had been quite an argument between the young husband and Sally on the day he received his mother's letter informing him of her return from abroad, and her intense amazement at his hasty marriage.

"I had always hoped to persuade you to let *me* pick out a wife for you, Jay, my darling son," she wrote. "I can only hope you have chosen wisely when you took the reins into your own hands. Come and make us a visit, and bring your wife with you. We are very anxious to meet her."

Sally frowned as he read the letter aloud.

Never in the world were two united who were so unsuited to each other. Why did the fates that are supposed to have the love affairs of mortals in charge, allow the wrong man to marry the wrong woman?

There was one thing over which Sally was exceedingly jubilant, and that was his loss of memory. That he had known such a person as Bernardine Moore, the old basket-maker's beautiful daughter, was entirely obliterated from his mind.

Some one had mentioned the great tenement-house fire in Jay Gardiner's presence, and the fact that quite a quaint character, a tipsy basket-maker, had lost his life therein, but the young doctor looked up without the slightest gleam of memory drifting through his brain. Not even when the person who was telling him the story went on to say that the great fire accomplished one good result, however, and that was the wiping out of the wine-house of Jasper Wilde & Son.

"Wilde—Jasper Wilde! It seems to me that I have heard that name before in

connection with some unpleasant transaction," said Doctor Gardiner, slowly.

"Oh, no doubt. You've probably read the name in the papers connected with some street brawl. Jasper Wilde, the son, is a well-dressed tough."

"Before going to see your mother, why not spend a few weeks at Newport with Sally," suggested Mrs. Pendleton to the doctor. "You know she has not been away on her wedding-trip yet."

He laughed a dry, mirthless laugh.

"She can go if she likes," he replied. "I can endure it."

Mrs. Pendleton bit her lip to keep back the angry retort, but wisely made no reply.

"It will never do to have the least disagreement with my wealthy, haughty son-in-law, if I can help it," she said to herself. "Especially as my husband is in such sore straits, and may have to come to him for a loan any day."

The following week Jay Gardiner and his bride reached Newport. The season was at its height. Yachts crowded the harbor; the hotels were filled to overflowing; every one who intended going to Newport was there now, and all seemed carried away on the eddying current of pleasure.

Young Mrs. Gardiner—*née* the pretty Sally Pendleton—plunged into the vortex of pleasure, and if her greed for admiration was not satisfied with the attention she received, it never would be.

Young Mrs. Gardiner knew no restraint. Her society was everywhere sought after. She was courted in every direction, and she took it all as her just due, by virtue of her marriage with the handsome millionaire, whom all the married belles were envying her, sighing to one another:

"Oh! how handsome he is—how elegant! and what a lordly manner he has! But, best of all, he lets his wife do just as she pleases."

But the older and wiser ones shook their heads sagaciously, declaring they scented danger afar off.

Little did they dream that the terrible calamity was nearer than they had anticipated.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Although, outwardly, young Mrs. Gardiner and her handsome husband lived ideal lives, yet could one have taken a peep behind the scenes, they would have seen that all was not gold that glittered.

In their own apartments, out of sight of the world's sharp eyes, Jay Gardiner and his wife used each other with the scantest possible courtesy. He never descended to the vulgarity of having words with her, though she did her utmost to provoke him to quarrel, saying to herself that anything was better than that dead calm, that haughty way he had of completely ignoring her in his elegant apartments.

During what every one believed to be the most blissful of honey-moons, Sally learned to hate her proud husband with a deadly hatred.

On the evening Mr. Victor Lamont made his appearance at the Ocean House, there was to be a grand ball given in honor of the guests, and, as every one had hoped, Mr. Lamont strolled in during the course of the evening, accompanied by mine host, who was over head and ears with delight in having such an honored guest stopping at his hotel.

Scores of girlish eyes brightened as they entered the arched door-way, and scores of hearts beat expectantly under pretty lace bodices. But their disappointment was great when this handsome Apollo glanced them all over critically, but did not ask any of them out to dance, and all the best waltzes were being then played.

Victor Lamont seemed quite indifferent to their shy glances.

During this time he was keeping up quite an animated conversation with his host, who was telling him, with pride, that *this* pretty girl was Miss This, and that pretty girl Miss So-and-So. But Victor Lamont would sooner have known who their fathers were.

At length, as his eyes traveled about the great ball-room with business-like carefulness, his gaze fell upon a slender figure in rose pink and fairly covered

with diamonds. They blazed like ropes of fire about the white throat and on the slender arms; they twinkled like immense stars from the shell-like ears and coyly draped bosom, and rose in a great tiara over the highly piled blonde hair.

She was standing under a great palm-tree, its green branches forming just the background that was needed to perfect the dainty picture in pink.

She was surrounded as usual by a group of admirers. Victor Lamont's indifference vanished. He was interested at last.

"Who is the young lady under the palm directly opposite?" he asked, quickly.

"The belle of Newport," was the reply. "Shall I present you?"

"I should be delighted," was the quick response. Instantly rebellion rose in the heart of every girl in the room, and resentment showed in scores of flushed cheeks and angry eyes as the hero of the evening was led over to pretty Sally Gardiner.

No wonder they watched him with dismay. From the moment graceful Mr. Lamont was presented to her, he made no attempt to disguise how completely he was smitten by her.

"That is a delightful waltz," he said, bending over the little hand as the dance music struck up.

Sally bowed, and placed a dainty little hand lightly on his shoulder, his arm encircled the slender waist, and away they went whirling through the bewildering stretch of ball-room, a cloud of pink and flashing diamonds, the curly blonde head and the blonde, mustached face dangerously near each other.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

If young Mrs. Gardiner heard the ominous whispers on all sides of her, regarding her open flirtation with handsome Victor Lamont, she did not heed them. She meant to show the haughty husband whom she had learned to hate with such a deadly hatred, that other men would show her attention.

The world owed her pleasure, a good time, and love by right of her youth and beauty, and she meant to have them at whatever cost.

Victor Lamont struck her fancy. He was gay, debonair, and was certainly in love with her; and, in open defiance of the consequences, she rushed madly on, in her quest of pleasure, toward the precipice covered with flowers that was yawning to receive her.

The beginning of the end came in a very strange way. One evening there was a grand hop at the Ocean House. It was one of the most brilliant affairs of the season. The magnificent ball-room was crowded to overflowing with beauty and fashion. Every one who was any one in all gay Newport was present. Jay Gardiner had been suddenly called away to attend to some very important business in Boston, and consequently would not be able to attend. But that made no difference about Sally's going; indeed, it was a relief to her to know that he would not be there.

It occasioned no surprise, even though comments of disapproval waged louder than ever, when the beautiful young Mrs. Gardiner, the married belle of the ball, entered, leaning upon Victor Lamont's arm.

Those who saw her whispered one to another that the reigning beauty of Newport quite surpassed herself to-night—that even the buds had better look to their laurels. The maids and the matrons, even the gentlemen, looked askance when they saw Victor Lamont and young Mrs. Gardiner dance every dance together, and the murmur of stern disapproval grew louder.

At last, the couple was missed from the ball-room altogether. Some one reported having seen them strolling up and down the beach in the moonlight. There was

no mistaking the tall, broad-shouldered, handsome Englishman, and the trim, dainty little figure in fleecy white, with the ermine wrap thrown over the pretty plump shoulders and round neck, on which rare diamonds, that would have paid a king's ransom, gleamed fitfully whenever the sportive breeze tossed back the ermine wrap.

Victor Lamont's fickle fancy for his companion had been a short-lived one. Like all male flirts, he soon tired of his conquests, and longed for new fields and new faces. He was considering this matter, when he received a letter that set him thinking. It was from his boon companion, Egremont, who was doing Long Branch.

There were four pages, written in cipher, which only Lamont could understand. The last one read as follows:

"Report has it that you are head and ears in love with a married beauty, and are carrying on a very open flirtation. Egad! my boy, that will never do. You have no time to waste in sentiment over other men's wives. You went to Newport with the avowed intention of capturing an heiress—some widow's daughter.

"You know how we stand as regards money. Money we must get somehow, some way—*any way*. We must realize five thousand dollars to save Hal, between now and this day week. It remains for you to think of some way to obtain it. If Hal peached on us, we would go up along with him, so, you see, the money *must* be raised somehow.

"My fall on the day I landed here, laying me up with a sprained ankle, was an unfortunate affair, for it prevented me from making the harvest we counted on. So everything falls on your shoulders.

"You must have learned by this time who is who, and where they keep their jewels and pocket-books. If I am able to get about, I will run over to see you on Saturday next. Two or three of our friends will accompany me.

"Yours in haste,
"EGREMONT."

The day appointed saw three men alight from the early morning train. They had occupied different cars, and swung off onto the platform from different places. But the old policeman, who had done duty at the station of the famous watering-place for nearly two decades, noted them at once with his keen, experienced eye.

"A trio of crooks," he muttered, looking after them. "I can tell it from their shifting glances and hitching gait, as though they never could break from the habit of the lock-step; I will keep my eye on them."

Although the three men went to different hotels, they had been scarcely an hour in Newport before they all assembled in the room of the man who had written to Lamont, signing himself Egremont.

"It is deuced strange Victor doesn't come," he said, impatiently. "He must have received both my letter and telegram."

At that moment there was a step outside, the door opened, and Victor Lamont, the subject of their conversation, strode into the apartment.

"It was a mighty risky step, pals, for you to come to Newport, and, above all, to expect me to keep this appointment with you to-day!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "Didn't you know that?"

And with that he pulled the door to after him with a bang.

It was nearly two hours ere Victor Lamont, with his hat pulled down over his eyes, quitted the hostelry and his companions, and then he went by a side entrance, first glancing quickly up and down the street to note if there was any one about who would be apt to recognize him.

The coast being apparently clear, he stepped out into the street, walked rapidly away, and turned the nearest corner.

"If it could be done!" he muttered, under his breath. "The chance is a desperate one, but, as Egremont says, we must raise money *somehow*. Well, it's a pretty daring scheme; but I am in for it, if the pretty little beauty can be induced to stroll on the beach to-night."

Night had come, and to Victor Lamont's great delight, he received a pretty, cream-tinted, sweet-scented, monogrammed note from Sally Gardiner, saying that she would be pleased to accept his escort that evening, and would meet him in the reception-room an hour later.

Lamont's eyes sparkled with joy as he saw her, for she was resplendent in a dream of white lace, and wore all her magnificent diamonds.

He was obliged to promenade and dance with her for an hour or so, although he

knew his companions would be waiting with the utmost impatience on the shore.

When he proposed the stroll, he looked at her keenly, his lips apart, intense eagerness in his voice.

To his great relief, she acquiesced at once.

"Though," she added, laughingly, "I do not suppose it would be as safe to wear all my diamonds on the beach as it would be if we just promenaded the piazza."

"It would be a thousand times more romantic," he whispered, his glance thrilling her through and through, his hand tightening over the little one resting on his arm.

And so, as the moth follows the flickering, dancing flame, foolish Sally Gardiner, without a thought of danger, took the arm of the handsome stranger whom she had known but a few short weeks, and sauntered out upon the beach with him.

There were hundreds of promenaders, and no one noticed them particularly.

On and on they walked, Lamont whispering soft, sweet nothings into her foolish ears, until they had left most of the throng far behind them.

"Hack, sir!—hack to ride up and down the beach!" exclaimed a man, stopping a pair of mettlesome horses almost directly in front of them.

Victor Lamont appeared to hesitate an instant; but in that instant he and the driver had exchanged meaning glances.

"Shall we not ride up and down, instead of walking?" suggested Lamont, eagerly. "I—I have something to tell you, and I may never have such an opportunity again. We can ride down as far as the light-house on the point, and back. Do not refuse me so slight a favor, I beg of you."

If she had stopped to consider, even for one instant, she would have declined the invitation; but, almost before she had decided whether she should say yes or no, Victor Lamont had lifted her in his strong arms, placed her in the cab, and sprung in after her.

Pretty, jolly Sally Gardiner looked a trifle embarrassed.

"Oh, how imprudent, Mr. Lamont!" she cried, clinging to his arm, as the full

consciousness of the situation seemed to occur to her. "We had better get out, and walk back to the Ocean House."

But it was too late for objections. The driver had already whipped up his horses, and instead of creeping wearily along, after the fashion of tired hack horses, they flew down the beach like the wind.

"Oh, Mrs. Gardiner—Sally!" cried Victor Lamont, in a voice apparently husky with emotion, "the memory of this ride will be with me while life lasts!"

Victor Lamont's voice died away in a hoarse whisper; the hand which caught and held her own closed tighter over it, and the hoarse murmur of the sea seemed further and further away.

Sally Gardiner seemed only conscious of one thing—that Victor Lamont loved her.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

For a moment the words falling so passionately from the lips of the handsome man sitting beside her, the spell of the moonlight, and the murmur of the waves, seemed to lock her senses in a delicious dream. But the dream lasted only a moment. In the next, she had recovered herself.

"Oh, Mr. Lamont, we must—we must get right out and walk back to the hotel! What if any one should see us riding together? Jay would be sure to hear of it, and there would be trouble in store for both of us."

"It is all in a life-time," he murmured. "Can you not be happy here with me——"

But she broke away from his detaining hand in alarm. She had been guilty of an imprudent flirtation; but she had meant nothing more. She had drifted into this delusive friendship and companionship without so much as bothering her pretty golden head about how it would end. Now she was just beginning to see how foolish she had been—when this handsome stranger could be nothing to her—nothing.

"We must not ride any further," she declared. "Give orders for the coach to stop right here, Mr. Lamont."

"It is too late, dear lady," he gasped. "The horses are running away! For God's sake, don't attempt to scream or to jump, or you will be killed!"

With a wild sob of terror, Sally flung herself down on her knees, and the lips that had never yet said, "God be praised," cried "God be merciful!"

"Don't make such a confounded noise!" exclaimed Lamont, attempting to lift her again to the seat beside him. "We won't get hurt if you only keep quiet. The driver is doing his best to get control of the horses. They can't keep up this mad pace much longer, and will be obliged to stop from sheer exhaustion."

After what appeared to be an age to the terrified young woman crouching there in such utter fright, the vehicle stopped short with a sharp thud and a lurch forward that would have thrown Sally upon her face, had not her companion

reached forward and caught her.

"Well, driver," called out Lamont, as he thrust open the door and looked out, "here's a pretty go, isn't it? Turn right around, and go back as quickly as your horses can take us!"

"I am awfully sorry to say that I won't be able to obey your order, sir," replied the man on the box, with a slight cough. "We've had an accident. The horses are dead lame, and we've had a serious break-down, and that, too, when we are over thirty miles from Newport. Confound the luck!"

Sally had been listening to this conversation, and as the driver's words fell on her ears, she was filled with consternation and alarm. Her tongue cleaved to the roof of her mouth, and her eyes nearly jumped from their sockets.

Miles away from the Ocean House, and she in those white kid slippers! How in the name of Heaven was she to get back? Jay Gardiner would return on the midnight train, and when he found she was not there, he would institute a search for her, and some one of the scouting party would find her in that broken-down coach by the road-side, with Victor Lamont as her companion.

She dared not think what would happen then. Perhaps there would be a duel; perhaps, in his anger, Jay Gardiner might turn his weapon upon herself. And she sobbed out in still wilder affright as she pictured the scene in her mind.

"There is but one thing to be done. You will have to ride one of your horses back to Newport, and bring out a team to fetch us back," declared Victor Lamont, with well-simulated impatience and anger.

"That I could do, sir," replied the man, "and you and the lady could make yourselves as comfortable as possible in the coach."

"Bring back some vehicle to get us into Newport before midnight, and I'll give you the price of your horse," cried Victor Lamont in an apparently eager voice.

"All right, sir," replied the driver. "I'll do my best."

And in a trice he was off, as Sally supposed, on his mission. She had listened, with chattering teeth, to all that had been said.

"Oh, goodness gracious! Mr. Lamont," she asked, "why are you peering out of the coach window? Do you see—or hear—anybody?"

He did not attempt to take her hand or talk sentimental nonsense to her now. That was not part of the business he had before him.

"Do not be unnecessarily frightened," he murmured; "but I fancied—mind, I only say fancied—that I heard cautious footsteps creeping over the fallen leaves. Perhaps it was a rabbit, you know—a stray dog, or mischievous squirrel."

Sally was clutching at his arm in wild affright.

"I—I heard the same noise, too!" she cried, with bated breath, "and, oh! Mr. Lamont, it *did* sound like a footstep creeping cautiously toward us! I was just about to speak to you of it."

Five, ten minutes passed in utter silence. Victor Lamont made no effort to talk to her. This was one of the times when talking sentiment would not have been diplomatic.

"Oh, Mr. Lamont!" cried Sally, clinging to him in the greatest terror, "I am sure we both could not have been mistaken. There *is* some one skulking about under the shadow of those trees—one—two—three—persons; I see them distinctly."

"You are right," he whispered, catching her trembling, death-cold hands in his, and adding, with a groan of despair: "Heaven help us! what can we do? Without a weapon of any kind, I am no match for a trio of desperadoes!"

Young Mrs. Gardiner was too terrified to reply. She could not have uttered a word if her life had depended upon it.

At that instant the vehicle was surrounded by three masked figures. The light from a bull's-eye lantern was flashed in Sally's face as the door was thrown violently back, and a harsh voice cried out, as a rough hand grasped her:

"Just hand over those jewels, lady, and be nimble, too, or we'll tear 'em off you! Egg, you relieve the gent of his money and valuables."

"Help! help! help!" cried Sally, struggling frantically; but the man who had hold of her arm only laughed, declaring she had a good pair of lungs.

Victor Lamont made a pretense of making a valiant struggle to come to her rescue. But what could he do, with two revolvers held close to his head, but stand and deliver.

Then the magnificent Gardiner diamonds, with their slender golden fastenings,

were torn from her, and were soon pocketed by the desperado, who had turned a revolver upon her.

"Thanks, and good-bye, fair lady," laughed the trio, retreating.

But Sally had not heard. She had fallen back on the seat of the coach in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Seeing that his victim had lost consciousness, the man paused in his work, and turned around to Lamont with a loud laugh.

"A capital night's work," he declared. "You ought to have made good your time by having three or four simpletons like this one, who wears expensive jewels, fall in love with you."

It was fully an hour after Victor Lamont's accomplices—for such they were—had retreated, that Sally opened her eyes to consciousness.

For a moment she was dazed. Where was she? This was certainly not her room at the Ocean House.

In an instant all the terrible scenes she had passed through recurred to her. She was in the cab—*alone*! With a spasmodic gesture, she caught at her neck. Ah, Heaven! the diamond necklace, all her jewels, were indeed gone!

With a cry that was like nothing human, she sprung to her feet, and at that moment she heard a deep groan outside, and she realized that it must be Victor Lamont. Perhaps they had hurt him; perhaps he was dying.

"Oh, Mr. Lamont," she cried out in agony, "where are you?" and waited breathlessly for his response.

"Here," he groaned; "bound fast hand and foot to the wheel of the cab. Can you come to my aid?"

With feet that trembled under her, and hands shaking like aspen leaves, she made her way to him, crying out that her diamonds were gone.

"How shall I ever forgive myself for this night's work!" he cried. "Oh, Mrs. Gardiner—Sally—why don't you abuse me? Why don't you fling it into my face that it was all my fault, persuading you to take this ride that has ended so fatally? For myself I care not, though I am ruined. They have taken every penny I had with me. But it is for you I grieve."

Sally listened, but made no reply. What could she say?

She tried her utmost to undo the great cords which apparently bound her companion; but it was quite useless. They were too much for her slender fingers.

"Never mind," he said, speaking faintly. "I have borne the torture of these ropes cutting into my flesh so many hours now, that I can stand it until that cabman returns. I bribed him to return within an hour; but his horse is so lame, that will be almost impossible."

"How dark it is!" moaned Sally. "Oh, I am fairly quaking with terror!"

"It is the darkness which precedes the dawn," he remarked; and as he uttered the words, he coughed twice.

A moment later, Sally cried out, joyfully:

"Oh, I hear the sound of carriage wheels! That cabman is returning at last, thank the fates."

Yes, it was the cabman, who seemed almost overwhelmed with terror when he saw the condition of the two passengers, and heard of the robbery which had taken place.

"I'll get you back to Newport by daylight, sir," he cried, turning to Victor Lamont, "and we can drive direct to the police-station, where you can report your great loss."

"No, no, no!" cried Sally, clinging to Lamont's arm, as she imagined herself standing before a police magistrate, and trying to tell him the story.

"I understand your feelings perfectly," whispered Lamont, pressing her arm reassuringly. "The story of our losses must not get out. No, we *dare not* ask the police to help us recover your diamonds and my money, because of the consequences."

Wretched Sally was obliged to agree with this line of thinking.

Neither spoke much on that homeward ride. Sally was wondering if she would be able to evade suspicion, and gain her rooms unrecognized; and Lamont was wondering if the beautiful married flirt realized how completely she was in his power.

He had concocted a brilliant scheme, and he meant to put it into execution with as little delay as possible.

Jay Gardiner was lavish in giving money to his young wife, and he—Lamont—meant to have some of that cash—ay, the most of it. He had thought of a clever scheme to obtain it.

The driver was as good as his word this time. He landed them as near to the hotel as possible, and that, too, when the early dawn was just breaking through the eastern horizon.

With cloak pulled closely about her, and veil drawn close over her face, Sally accompanied the driver of the coach to the servants' entrance.

It was not without some shame and confusion that she heard the ignorant coachman pass her off as his sweetheart, and ask his brother, the night-watchman, to admit her on the sly, as she was one of the girls employed in the house.

She fairly flew past them and up the broad stairway, and never paused until she reached her own room, threw, open the door, and sprung into it, quaking with terror.

Antoinette, her French maid, lay dozing en a velvet couch. She hoped that she would be able to slip past her without awakening her; but this was destined not to be.

Antoinette heard the door creak, and she was on her feet like a flash.

"Oh, my lady, it is you!" she whispered, marveling much where her mistress got such a queer bonnet and cloak. "Let me help you take off your wrap. You look pale as death. Are you ill?"

"No, no, Antoinette," replied Mrs. Gardiner, flushing hotly, annoyed with herself, the inquisitive maid, and the world in general. But she felt that she must make some kind of an excuse, say something. "Yes, I'm tired out," she replied, quickly. "I was called away to see a sick friend, and had to go just as I was, as there was not a moment to lose."

"You were very prudent, my lady, to remove your magnificent jewels. Shall I not take them from your pocket, and replace them in their caskets, and lock them safely away?"

"I will attend to them myself, Antoinette," she panted, hoarsely. "Help me off with this—this ball-dress, and get me to bed. I am fagged out for want of sleep. I do not want any breakfast; do not awake me."

Looking at her mistress keenly from beneath her long lashes, Antoinette saw that she was terribly agitated.

Long after the inner door had closed on her, Antoinette sat thinking, and muttered, thoughtfully:

"I shall find out where my lady was last night. Trust me to learn her secret, and then she will be in my power!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Victor Lamont had been quite correct in his surmise. Jay Gardiner had reached Newport several hours later than he had calculated, and had gone directly to his own apartments.

He was so tired with his long trip that he would have thrown himself on his couch just as he was, had not a letter, addressed to himself, staring at him from the mantel, caught his eye, and on the lower left-hand corner he observed the words: "Important. Deliver at once."

Mechanically he took it down and tore the envelope. The superscription seemed familiar—he had seen that handwriting before.

He looked down at the bottom of the last page, to learn who his correspondent was, and saw, with surprise, and not a little annoyance, that it was signed "Anonymous."

He was about to crush it in his hand and toss it into the waste-paper basket, when it occurred to him that he might as well learn its contents.

There were but two pages, and they read as follows:

"To DOCTOR JAY GARDINER, ESQ., Ocean House, Newport.

"*Dear Sir*—I know the utter contempt in which any warning given by an anonymous writer is held, but, notwithstanding this, I feel compelled to communicate by this means, that which has become the gossip of Newport—though you appear to be strangely deaf and blind to it.

"To be as brief as possible, I refer to the conduct of your wife's flirtations, flagrant and above board, with Victor Lamont, the English lord, or duke, or count, or whatever he is. I warn you to open your eyes and look about, and listen a bit, too.

"When your wife, in defiance of all the proprieties, is seen riding alone with this Lamont at midnight, when you are known to be away, it is time for a stranger to

attempt to inform the husband.

"Yours with respect,
"AN ANONYMOUS FRIEND."

For some moments after he had finished reading that letter, Jay Gardiner sat like one stunned; then slowly he read it again, as though to take in more clearly its awful meaning.

"Great God!" he cried out; "can this indeed be true?"

If it was, he wondered that he had not noticed it. Then he recollected, with a start of dismay, that since they had been domiciled at the Ocean House he had not spent one hour of his time with Sally that could be spent elsewhere. He had scarcely noticed her; he had not spoken to her more than half a dozen times. He had not only shut her out from his heart, but from himself.

He had told himself over and over again that he would have to shun his wife or he would hate her.

She had seemed satisfied with this so long as she was supplied with money, horses and carriages, laces and diamonds.

Was there any truth in what this anonymous letter stated—that she had so far forgotten the proprieties as to ride with this stranger.

He springs from his seat and paces furiously up and down the length of the room, the veins standing out on his forehead like whip-cords. He forgets that it is almost morning, forgets that he is tired.

He goes straight to his wife's room. He turns the knob, but he can not enter for the door is locked. He knocks, but receives no answer, and turning away, he enters his own apartment again, to wait another hour. Up and down the floor he walks.

Can what he has read be true? Has the girl whom he has married, against his will, as it were, made a laughing-stock of him in the eyes of every man and woman in Newport? *Dared* she do it?

He goes out into the hall once more, and is just in time to see his wife's French maid returning from breakfast. He pushes past the girl, and strides into the inner apartment.

Sally is sitting by the window in a pale-blue silk wrapper wonderfully trimmed with billows of rare lace, baby blue ribbons and jeweled buckles, her yellow hair falling down over her shoulders in a rippling mass of tangled curls.

Jay Gardiner does not stop to admire the pretty picture she makes, but steps across the floor to where she sits.

"Mrs. Gardiner," he cries, hoarsely, "if you have the time to listen to me, I should like a few words with you here and now."

Sally's guilty heart leaps up into her throat.

How much has he discovered of what happened last night? Does he know all?

He is standing before her with flushed face and flashing eyes. She cowers from him, and if guilt was ever stamped on a woman's face, it is stamped on hers at that instant. If her life had depended upon it, she could not have uttered a word.

"Read that!" he cried, thrusting the open letter into her hand—"read that, and answer me, are those charges false or true?"

For an instant her face had blanched white as death, but in the next she had recovered something of her usual bravado and daring. That heavy hand upon her shoulder seemed to give her new life.

She took in the contents of the letter at a single glance, and then she sprung from her seat and faced him defiantly. Oh, how terribly white and stern his face had grown since he had entered that room.

"Did you hear the question I put to you, Mrs. Gardiner?" he cried, hoarsely, his temper and his suspicions fairly aroused at Sally's expression.

The truth of the words in the anonymous letter is slowly forcing itself upon him.

If ever a woman looked guilty, *she* did at that moment. She stands trembling before him, her eyes fixed upon the floor, her figure drooping, her hands tightly clasped.

"Well?" he says, sharply; and she realizes that there is no mercy in that tone; he will be pitiless, hard as marble.

"It ought never to have been," she said, as if speaking to herself. "I wish I could undo it."

"You wish you could undo what?" asked her husband, sternly.

"Our marriage. It was all a mistake—all a mistake," she faltered.

She must say something, and those are the first words that come across her mind. While he is answering them, she will have an instant of time to think what she will say about the contents of the letter.

Deny it she will with her latest breath. Let him *prove* that she went riding with Victor Lamont—*if he can!*

Jay Gardiner's face turns livid, and in a voice which he in vain tries to make steady, he says:

"How long have you thought so?"

"Since yesterday," she answered, her eyes still fixed on the floor.

"Since yesterday"—Jay Gardiner is almost choking with anger as he repeats her words—"since you, another man's wife, took that midnight ride which this letter refers to?"

The sarcasm which pervades the last words makes her flush to the roots of her yellow hair.

"But that I am too much amused, I should be tempted to be angry with you for believing a story from such a ridiculous source," she declared, raising her face defiantly to his.

"Then you deny it?" he cried, grasping her white arm. "You say there is no truth in the report?"

"Not one word," she answered. "I left the ball-room early, because it was lonely for me there *without you*, and came directly to my room. Antoinette could have told you that had you taken the pains to inquire of her."

"It would ill become me to make such an inquiry of a servant in my employ," he replied. "You are the one to answer me."

"If the ridiculous story *had* been true, you could not have wondered at it much," she declared, with a hard glitter in her eye, and a still harder laugh on her red lips. "When a man neglects his wife, is it any wonder that she turns to some one else for amusement and—and comfort?"

"Call your maid at once to pack up your trunks. We leave the Ocean House within an hour."

With these words, he strode out of the room, banging the door after him.

"God! how I hate that man!" hissed Sally. "I think his death will lay at my door yet."

CHAPTER XL.

Leave Newport when the season was at its height! The very thought of such a thing was bitterness itself to Sally Gardiner, this butterfly of fashion, who loved the whirl of society as dearly as the breath of life.

Antoinette entered, bearing a bouquet of fragrant crimson roses in her hand.

Sally sprung from the chair, into which she had sunk a moment before, with a frightened little cry.

What if Jay Gardiner had by chance been in the room when those roses were brought in, with Victor Lamont's card attached? What if he had snatched them from Antoinette's hand, and discovered the note that was hidden in their fragrant depths?

"The handsome English gentleman sends these, with his compliments, to madame," whispered the girl, after casting a furtive glance about the apartment, to make sure Doctor Gardiner had gone.

"Yes, yes," murmured Sally, blushing furiously. "Hand them to me, and then go into the next room. I shall not want you for a few moments. When I do, I will ring."

She could hardly restrain her impatience until the door had closed to learn what Victor Lamont had been so rash, after last night's escapade, as to write to her about.

She had little difficulty in finding the note.

There were but a few lines, and they read as follows:

"MY DEAR MRS. GARDINER—SALLY—I must see you *without delay*. I am pacing up and down the beach, waiting for you to come to me. You would not *dare* fail me if you knew all that depends upon my seeing you.

"Yours, in haste and in waiting,

"VICTOR."

"Great Heaven!" muttered Sally, "how *can* I go to him after the stormy interview I have just had with my husband? It is utterly impossible, as we go from here within the hour. I ought to say good-bye to the poor fellow. But what if Jay should be out on the beach, or on the piazza, or in the office, and see me slip out of the hotel? He would be sure to follow me, and then there would be a scene, perhaps a fight."

Again and again she read the note, which she was twisting about her white fingers.

We all know what happens to the woman who hesitates—she is lost.

She touched the bell with nervous fingers.

"Antoinette," she said, when her French maid appeared, "I should like to borrow your cloak, hat, and veil for a little while. One does not always like to be known when one goes out on a mission of charity."

"Certainly, madame," replied Antoinette. "Take anything I have in welcome. But, oh, dear me, my smartest jacket will look wofully clumsy on madame's lovely form!"

"Help me on with them quickly, my good girl," cut in Sally, nervously; "and if any one asks for me when I am out—no matter who it is—say that I have lain down with a severe headache, and can not on any account, be disturbed."

In a few moments more, a trim, dainty figure was gliding swiftly along the beach, heavily veiled and all alone.

Yes, he was there waiting for her. There was no mistaking that splendid figure, which was attracting the attention of so many young girls and their chaperons.

With a sweep of her white hand, Sally put back her veil, and stood before him in the garb of her French maid.

For an instant, this unexpected discovery and the remembrance of the remark he had but just uttered recurred to him, and a dull red swept over his face.

"Mrs. Gardiner—Sally!" he cried, rapturously, "I—I was just about to give the woman to whom I intrusted that note to give to your Antoinette a fine setting out."

"Let us walk leisurely along," he suggested. "We will then be less likely to attract attention. I was anxious to know if you reached your apartments in safety," he went on in his most winning tone; but before she had time to reply, he went on quickly: "I was not so fortunate in escaping recognition. I no sooner stepped into the office of the hotel, than a gentleman approached me.

"'Ah, Lamont,' he exclaimed, 'I am very glad to see you, though you have given me a deuce of a long wait.'

"Turning quickly, I beheld, to my utter dismay, the gentleman from New York to whom I owed that large sum of money I told you about.

"'I was here in time to take in the ball last night,' he went on. 'I came on particularly to see you. You were having such a good time dancing, with that pretty little creature in white that I did not disturb you by letting you know of my presence; but after the ball you suddenly disappeared, and I have been waiting in this office for you, expecting you to appear every moment. I could not wait a moment longer than was absolutely necessary, my business with you is so imperative.'

"To make a long story short, Mrs. Gardiner—Sally—he informed me that he should be obliged to draw upon me at once for money I owed him; in fact, that he *must* have it to-day."

"Oh, what will you do, Mr. Lamont?" cried Sally, sympathetically. "What in the world will you do—what will you say?"

"That is just the trouble—what shall I do—what can I say to him? He is a man of iron will and terrible temper. He knows, he has learned through my bankers in New York, that I drew out every cent I had in their bank to pay him. How am I to face him, and tell him that it is gone? I know full well he will have me arrested, and the coachman will be brought forward who drove me up to the door, and then the whole story will leak out."

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried Sally, standing quite still on the sands, wringing her hands and commencing to cry, "if that story comes out, I am ruined. Jay Gardiner will leave me, and I will be a beggar!"

"Just so," returned Victor Lamont, softly. "We must make every effort to keep the matter quiet, and there is but one way out of the tangle—only one."

"And what is that?" cried Sally.

"You must save me, and in doing so, save yourself. Sally—Mrs. Gardiner," he whispered, rapidly, "you must help me raise money somehow to meet this man's demands."

"But I haven't any money!" moaned Sally. "I have spent the money my husband gave me—spent it long ago!"

"You must get it somehow," he declared, hoarsely. "Borrow it from some of the husbands of your lady friends, and tell them not to let Jay Gardiner know. You are a woman of wealth and influence; you can easily raise the money I want—and *you must do it*!"

"I shall not have time to even try to get the money," she declared. "We leave Newport within the hour. Antoinette is packing the trunks now. It will be almost time to leave when I reach the hotel."

"You must ask Jay Gardiner for the money, then," he replied, doggedly, "and instruct Antoinette to hand it to me in the reading-room, and that, too, ere you step into your carriage."

"Is that a threat?"

She had hardly time to ask the question, ere she saw Antoinette coming hurriedly toward her.

With a hurried, "You heard what I said; do not fail me," Victor Lamont raised his hat, turned on his heel, and strode away.

She was racking her brains as to how she should raise the money for Victor Lamont in a half hour's time, in order to save herself from the exposure that would be sure to follow if she failed to do so.

She was driven to extremities. Yes, there was no other way but to borrow it from some of the guests she knew, and this could not be accomplished without Antoinette's assistance.

By the time the girl returned, she had made up her mind as to what course she would pursue. To-day's work would put her forever in the French maid's power; but there was no help for it—none whatever.

"Antoinette," she said in an unsteady voice, as soon as she had drained the wine the maid had brought, "I am in trouble, and I want you to help me."

"You can rely upon me, my lady," replied the girl. "I will do anything in the world for you, and tell no one."

"You are very good," murmured her young mistress incoherently. "I—I have lost something valuable belonging to my husband. It will take a great deal of money to replace it, and it must be replaced at once, before he misses it. To do this, I am obliged to borrow money until I get my next allowance from him. There are several persons in the hotel who would willingly loan me the money if they but knew of my predicament. I must see one after another in that little private parlor off the reception-room, until I have secured the amount I need. You will bring them to me."

"I understand, my lady," nodded the maid.

Flushed, and trembling with excitement, Sally stepped down to the private parlor, after giving Antoinette a score of names on a slip of paper.

One by one, the clever French maid conducted the persons she had been sent in search of to her mistress.

Each gentleman listened in surprise to the appeal young Mrs. Gardiner made to them—she the bride of a man worth millions.

In most instances, the gentlemen carried large sums of money with them, and their hands flew to their well-filled pockets at once. They would be only too pleased, they declared. How much would she need?

Sally named as large a sum as she thought each of them could stand, and in less than half an hour she had the full amount which Victor Lamont had said he must have.

CHAPTER XLI.

"Now send Mr. Lamont to me here without delay," she said to Antoinette.

The girl did not have to do much searching. Mr. Lamont was in the corridor. He hastened to answer the summons with alacrity.

"There is the money," cried Sally, almost swooning from excitement. "Thirty thousand dollars, and——"

"By George! you are a trump, my dear!" exclaimed Victor Lamont, restraining himself by the greatest effort from uttering a wild whoop of delight. "That was splendidly done!"

Sally looked the disgust that swept over her.

"I have it all to pay back within three months," she said. "You have forgotten that, it seems, Mr. Lamont, and by that time I shall expect you to have procured the money to reimburse these gentlemen."

Victor Lamont laughed a sarcastic laugh.

"I shall not detain you longer, my dear Mrs. Gardiner," he said. "Your husband will be waiting to take you to the train. I shall not say good-bye, but *au revoir*. I will write you, sending my letters addressed to your maid, Antoinette. She will give them to you."

"No, no!" answered Sally, nervously; "you must never write to me, only send me the money to repay today's indebtedness. Our friendship, which we drifted into unconsciously, was a terrible mistake. It has ended in disaster, and it must stop here and now."

"As the queen wills," murmured Lamont, raising to his lips the little white hand that had given him so much money.

But deep down in his heart he had no intention of letting slip through his fingers a woman who had turned into a veritable gold mine under his subtle tuition. Ah,

no! that was only the beginning of the vast sums she must raise for him in the future.

CHAPTER XLII.

As the carriage containing Jay Gardiner and Sally came to a sudden stop, he put his head out of the window to learn the cause, and found they had already reached the station.

"We shall reach home by nightfall," he said in a tone of relief.

But to this remark Sally made no reply. She was wondering how she could ever endure life under the same roof with his prying mother and sister.

While we leave them speeding onward, toward the place which was to be the scene of a pitiful tragedy, we must draw back the curtain which has veiled the past, and learn what has become of beautiful, hapless Bernardine.

After her desertion by the young husband whom she had but just wedded, and the theft of the money which he had placed in her hands, she lay tossing in the ravages of brain fever for many weeks in the home to which the kind-hearted policeman had escorted her.

But her youth, health, and strength at last gained the victory, and one day, in the late summer, the doctor in charge pronounced her well, entirely cured, but very weak.

As soon as she was able to leave her bed, Bernardine sent for the matron.

"You have all been very kind to me," she said, tears shining in her dark eyes. "You have saved my life; but perhaps it would have been better if you had let me die."

"No, no, my dear; you must not say that," responded the good woman, quickly. "The Lord intends you to do much good on earth yet. When you are a little stronger, we will talk about your future."

"I am strong enough to talk about it now," replied Bernardine. "You know I am poor, and the only way by which a poor girl can live is by working."

"I anticipated what you would say, my dear, and I have been making inquiries. Of course, I did not know exactly what you were fitted for, but I supposed you would like to be a companion to some nice lady, governess to little children, or something like that."

"I should be thankful to take anything that offers itself," said Bernardine.

"It is our principal mission to find work for young girls who seek the shelter of this roof," went on the matron, kindly. "The wealthy ladies who keep this home up are very enthusiastic over that part of it. Every week they send us lists of ladies wanting some one in some capacity. I have now several letters from a wealthy woman residing at Lee, Massachusetts. She wants a companion; some one who will be willing to stay in a grand, gloomy old house, content with the duties allotted to her."

Bernardine's face fell; there was a look of disappointment in her dark eyes.

"I had hoped to get something to do in the city," she faltered.

"Work is exceedingly hard to obtain in New York just now, my dear child," replied the good woman. "There are thousands of young girls looking for situations who are actually starving. A chance like this occurs only once in a life-time."

Still, Bernardine looked troubled. How could she leave the city which held the one that was dearer than all in the world to her? Ah, how could she, and live?

"Let me show you the paper containing her advertisement," added the matron. "I brought it with me."

As she spoke, she produced a copy of a paper several weeks old, a paragraph of which was marked, and handed it to Bernadine.

"You can read it over and decide. Let me know when I come to you an hour later. I should advise you to try the place."

Left to herself, Bernardine turned to the column indicated, and slowly perused the advertisement. It read as follows:

"WANTED—A quiet, modest young lady as companion to an elderly woman living in a grand, gloomy old house in the suburbs of a New England village. Must come well recommended. Address MRS. GARDINER, Lee, Mass."

"Gardiner!"

The name fairly took Bernardine's breath away, for it was the name bestowed upon her by the young man who had wedded and deserted her within an hour.

The very sight of it made her heart grow sick and faint. Still, it held a strange fascination for her. She turned to look at it again—to study it closely, to see how it appeared in print, when, to her amazement, she caught the name "Jay Gardiner" in a column immediately adjoining it.

She glanced up at the head-lines, and as she did so, the very breath seemed to leave her body.

It was a sketch of life at Newport by a special correspondent, telling of the gayety that was going on among the people there, particularly at the Ocean House. Nearly, half a column was given to extolling the beauty of young Mrs. Gardiner, *née* Sally Pendleton, the bride of Doctor Jay Gardiner, her diamonds, her magnificent costumes, and smart turn-outs.

The paper fell from Bernardine's hands. She did not faint, or cry out, or utter any moan; she sat there quite still, like an image carved in stone. Jay Gardiner was at Newport with his bride!

The words seemed to have scorched their way down to the very depths of her soul and seared themselves there. Jay Gardiner was at Newport with his bride!

What, then, in Heaven's name was *she*?

Poor Bernardine! It seemed to her in that moment that she was dying.

Had he played a practical joke upon her? Was the marriage which she had believed in so fully no marriage at all?

She had no certificate.

It was scarcely an hour from the time the matron had left her until she returned; but when she did so, she cried out in alarm, for Bernardine's face was of an ashen pallor, her dark eyes were like coals of fire, and her hands were cold as

death. The matron went up to her in great alarm, and gently touched the bowed head.

"Bernardine," she murmured, gently—"Bernardine, my poor child, are you ill? What has happened?"

After some little correspondence back and forth, Bernardine was accepted by the lady, and in a fortnight more she was able to make the journey.

The matron went down to the depot with her, to see her off, and prayed that the girl would not change her mind ere she reached her destination.

The train moved off, and she waved her handkerchief to the sweet, sad, tear-stained face pressed close to the window-pane until a curve in the road hid it from her sight; then she turned away with a sigh.

Bernardine fell back in her seat, not caring whether or not she lived to reach her destination.

It was almost dusk when the train reached the lovely little village of Lee, nestling like a bird's nest amid the sloping green hills.

Bernardine stepped from the car, then stood quite still on the platform, and looked in bewilderment around her.

Mrs. Gardiner had written that she would send a conveyance to the station to meet her; but Bernardine saw none.

While she was deliberating as to whether she should inquire the way to the Gardiner place of the station agent, that individual suddenly turned out the lights in the waiting-room, and in an instant had jumped on a bicycle and dashed away, leaving Bernardine alone in a strange place.

At that moment, a man stepped briskly beneath the swinging light. One glance, and she almost swooned from horror.

The man was Jasper Wilde!

CHAPTER XLIII.

For a moment it seemed to Bernardine as though she must surely fall dead from fright as her startled gaze encountered her greatest enemy, Jasper Wilde.

Had he followed her? Had he come all the way on the same train with her?

She realized that she was alone with him on this isolated railway platform, miles perhaps from any habitation, any human being, far beyond the reach of help.

The thick, heavy twilight had given place to a night of intense darkness. The flickering light of the solitary gas-lamp over the station door did not pierce the gloom more than three feet away. Bernardine did not know this, and she sunk back in deadly fear behind one of the large, old-fashioned, square posts. The long dark cloak and bonnet she wore would never betray her presence there.

Bernardine soon became aware that he had not seen her, for he stopped short scarcely a rod from her, drew out his watch, and looked at the time; then, with a fierce imprecation on his lips, he cried aloud:

"Missed the train by just one minute! Curse the luck! But then it's worth my trip here, and the trouble I've been put to, to know that the Mrs. Jay Gardiner in question is some New York society belle instead of Bernardine. Ah, if it were Bernardine, I would have followed him to the end of the earth and murdered him; taken her from him *by force*, if no other way presented itself. I love the girl to madness, and yet *I hate her* with all the strength of my nature!"

As he uttered the words, he wheeled about, hurried down the platform, and stepped into the darkness, the sound of his quick tread plainly dying away in the distance.

It seemed to Bernardine that her escape from the clutches of Jasper Wilde was little short of miraculous. Trembling in every limb, she stepped out from behind the large pillar which shielded her.

He had not come by the same train; he did not know she was here. But what caused him to come to this place to look for Jay Gardiner and his bride? Perhaps

it was because he had learned in some way that a family named Gardiner resided here, and he had come out of his way only to discover that they were *not* one and the same.

While Bernardine was ruminating over this, she saw the short, thick-set figure of a man approaching.

Should she advance or retreat? She felt sure he had seen her. He stopped quite short and looked at her.

"Surely *you* can't be Miss Moore?" he inquired, incredulously.

"Yes," replied Bernardine in a voice in which he detected tears.

The man muttered something under his breath which she did not quite catch.

"If you please, Miss, where is your luggage?"

"I—I have only this hand-bag," she faltered.

"Come this way, miss," he said; and Bernardine followed him, not without some misgiving, to the end of the platform from which Jasper Wilde had so recently disappeared.

Here she saw a coach in waiting, though she had not heard the sound of the horses' hoofs when they arrived there.

Then came a long ride over a level stretch of country. It was a great relief to Bernardine to see the moon come forth at last from a great bank of black clouds; it was a relief to see the surrounding country, the meadows, and the farm-houses lying here and there on either side of the steep road up which they went.

"Would the lady like her or be displeased with her?" she asked herself.

She determined to throw herself heart and soul into her work and try to forget the past—what might have been had her lover proved true, instead of being so cruelly false. Her red lips quivered piteously at the thought.

Her musings were brought to an end by the lumbering coach turning in at a large gate-way flanked by huge stone pillars, and proceeding leisurely up a wide road that led through a densely wooded park.

Very soon Bernardine beheld the house—a granite structure with no end of gables and dormer-windows—half hidden by climbing vines, which gave to the

granite pile a very picturesque appearance just now, for the vines were literally covered with sweet-scented honeysuckles in full bloom.

Mrs. King, the housekeeper, received Bernardine.

"I hope you will like it here," she said, earnestly; "but it is a dull place for one who is young, and longs, as girls do, for gayety and life. You are too tired to see Mrs. Gardiner to-night after your long journey. I will show you to your room after you have had some tea."

The housekeeper was right in her surmise. It did look like an inexpressibly dreary place when Bernardine looked about at the great arched hall.

Grand old paintings, a century old, judging by their antiquated look, hung upon the walls. A huge clock stood in one corner, and on either side of it there were huge elk heads, with spreading antlers tipped with solid gold.

To add to the strangeness of the place, a bright log fire burned in a huge open fire-place, which furnished both light and heat to the main corridor.

"This fire is never allowed to burn out, either in summer or winter," the housekeeper explained, "because the great hall is so cold and gloomy without it."

While Bernardine was drinking her tea, a message came to her that Mrs. Gardiner would see her in her *boudoir*.

The housekeeper led the way through a long corridor, and when she reached the further end of it, she turned toward the right, and drawing aside the heavy crimson velvet *portières*, Bernardine was ushered into a magnificent apartment.

The windows were of stained glass, ornamented with rare pictures, revealed by the light shining through them from an inner room; the chandeliers, with their crimson globes, gave a deep red glow to the handsome furnishings and costly bric-a-brac. There was something about the room that reminded Bernardine of the pictures her imagination had drawn of Oriental *boudoirs*.

Her musings were interrupted by the sound of a haughty voice saying:

"Are *you* Miss Bernardine Moore?"

By this time Bernardine's eyes had become accustomed to the dim, uncertain light. Turning her head in the direction whence the sound proceeded, she saw a very grand lady, dressed in stiff, shining brocade satin, with rare lace and

sparkling diamonds on her breast and fair hands, sitting in a crimson velvet arm-chair—a grand old lady, cold, haughty, and unbending.

"Yes, madame," replied Bernardine, in a sweet, low voice, "I am Miss Moore."

"You are a very much younger person than I supposed you to be from your letter, Miss Moore. Scarcely more than a child, I should say," she added, as she motioned Bernardine to a seat with a wave of the hand. "I will speak plainly," she went on, slowly. "I am disappointed. I imagined you to be a young lady of uncertain age—say, thirty or thirty-five. When a woman reaches that age, and has found no one to marry her, there is a chance of her becoming reconciled to her fate. I want a companion with whom I can feel secure. I do not want any trouble with love or lovers, above all. I would not like to get used to a companion, and have her leave me for some man. In fine, you see, I want one who will put all thought of love or marriage from her."

Bernardine held out her clasped hands.

"You need have no fear on that score, dear madame," she replied in a trembling tone. "I shall never love—I shall never marry. I—I never want to behold the face of a man. Please believe me and trust me."

"Since you are here, I may as well take you on trial," replied the grand old lady, resignedly. "Now you may go to your room, Miss Moore. You will come to me here at nine to-morrow morning," she said, dismissing Bernardine with a haughty nod.

The housekeeper had said she would find the room that had been prepared for her at the extreme end of the same corridor, and in groping her way to it in the dim, rose-colored light which pervaded the outer hall, she unconsciously turned in the wrong direction, and went to the right instead of the left.

The door stood ajar, and thinking the housekeeper had left it in this way for her, Bernardine pushed it open.

To her great astonishment, she found herself in a beautifully furnished sleeping apartment, upholstered in white and gold of the costliest description, and flooded by a radiance of brilliant light from a grand chandelier overhead.

But it was not the magnificent hangings, or the long mirrors, in their heavy gilt frames, that caught and held the girl's startled gaze.

It was a full-length portrait hanging over the marble mantle, and it startled her so that she uttered a low cry, and clasped her little hands together as children do when uttering a prayer.

Her reverie lasted only for a moment. Then she drifted back to the present. She was in this strange house as a companion, and the first thing she came across was the portrait, as natural as life itself, of—Jay Gardiner!

A mad desire came over her to kneel before the picture and—die!

CHAPTER XLIV.

Bernardine did not have much time to study the portrait, for all of a sudden she heard footsteps in the corridor without, and in another moment Mrs. King, the housekeeper, had crossed the threshold, and approached her excitedly.

"I feared you would be apt to make this mistake," she said, breathlessly. "Your room is in the opposite direction, Miss Moore."

Bernardine was about to turn away with a few words of apology, but the housekeeper laid a detaining hand on her arm.

"Do not say that you found your way into this apartment, Miss Moore," she said, "or it might cause me considerable trouble. This is the only room in the house that is opened but once a year, and only then to air it.

"This is young master's room," went on the housekeeper, confidentially, "and when he left home, after quite a bitter scene with his mother, the key was turned in the lock, and we were all forbidden to open it. That is young master's portrait, and an excellent likeness it is of him, too.

"The whole house was recently thrown into consternation by a letter being received from him, saying that he was about to bring home his bride. His mother and sister took his marriage very much to heart. The bride is beautiful, we hear; but, as is quite natural, I suppose his mother thinks a queen on her throne would have been none too good for her handsome son.

"My lady has had very little to say since learning that he would be here on the 20th—that is to-morrow night; and his sister, Miss Margaret, is equally as silent.

"I think it will be better to give you another room than the one I had at first intended," said Mrs. King. "Please follow me, and I will conduct you to it."

Bernardine complied, though the desire was strong upon her to fly precipitately from the house, and out into the darkness of the night—-anywhere—anywhere, so that she might escape meeting Jay Gardiner and his bride.

Up several flights of carpeted polished stairs, through draughty passages, along a broad corridor, down another passage, then into a huge, gloomy room, Bernardine followed her, a war of conflicting emotions surging through her heart at every step.

"You have plenty of room, you see," said the housekeeper, lighting the one gas-jet the apartment contained.

"Plenty!" echoed Bernardine, aghast, glancing about her in dismay at the huge, dark, four-poster bed in a far-off corner, the dark dresser, which seemed to melt into the shadows, and the three darkly outlined windows, with their heavy draperies closely drawn, that frowned down upon her.

"You must not be frightened if you hear odd noises in the night. It's only mice. This is the old part of the mansion," said the housekeeper, turning to go.

"Am I near any one else?" asked Bernardine, her heart sinking with a strange foreboding which she could not shake off.

"Not very near," answered the housekeeper.

"Would no one hear me if I screamed?" whispered Bernardine, drawing closer to her companion, as though she would detain her, her frightened eyes burning like two great coals of fire.

"I hope you will not make the experiment, Miss Moore," returned the housekeeper, impatiently. "Good-night," and with that she is gone, and Bernardine is left—alone.

The girl stands quite still where the housekeeper has left her long after the echo of her footsteps has died away.

She is in *his* home, and he is coming here with his bride! Great God! what irony of fate led her here?

Her bonnet and cloak are over her arm.

"Shall I don them, and fly from this place?" she asks herself over and over again.

But her tired limbs begin to ache, every nerve in her body begins to twitch, and she realizes that her tired nature has endured all it can. She must stay here, for the night at least.

Despite the fatigue of the previous night, Bernardine awoke early the next morning, and when the housekeeper came to call her, she found her already dressed.

"You are an early riser, Miss Moore," she said. "That is certainly a virtue which will commend itself to my mistress, who rises early herself. You will come at once to her *boudoir*. Follow me, Miss Moore."

She reached Mrs. Gardiner's *boudoir* before she was aware of it, so intent were her thoughts. That lady was sitting at a small marble table, sipping a cup of very fragrant coffee. A small, very odorous broiled bird lay on a square of browned toast on a silver plate before her. She pushed it aside as Bernardine entered.

"Good-morning, Miss Moore," she said, showing a trifle more kindliness than she had exhibited on the previous evening; "I hope you rested well last night. Sit down."

Bernardine complied; but before she could answer these commonplace, courteous remarks, an inner door opened, and a lady, neither very young nor very old, entered the room.

"Good-morning, mamma," she said; and by that remark Bernardine knew that this was Jay's sister.

She almost devoured her with eager eyes, trying to trace a resemblance in her features to her handsome brother.

"Margaret, this is my new companion, Miss Moore," said Mrs. Gardiner, languidly.

Bernardine blushed to the roots of her dark hair, as two dark-blue eyes, so like Jay's, looked into her own.

"Welcome to Gardiner Castle, Miss Moore," replied Margaret Gardiner.

She did not hold out her hand, but she looked into the startled young face with a kindly smile and a nod. Whatever her thoughts were in regard to her mother's companion, they were not expressed in her face.

A score of times during the half hour that followed, Bernardine tried to find courage to tell Mrs. Gardiner that she must go away; that she could not live under that roof and meet the man she loved, and who was to bring home a bride.

But each time the words died away on her lips. Then suddenly, she could not tell how or when the feeling entered her heart, the longing came to her to look upon the face of the young girl who had gained the love she would have given her very life—ay, her hope of heaven—to have retained.

CHAPTER XLV.

To sit quietly by and hear mother and daughter discuss the man she loved, was as hard for Bernardine to endure as the pangs of death.

"He is sure to be a worshipful husband," said Miss Margaret. "I always said love would be a grand passion with Jay. He will love once, and that will be forever, and to his wife he will be always true."

Poor, hapless Bernardine could have cried aloud as she listened. What would that proud lady-mother and that haughty sister say if they but knew how he had tricked her into a sham marriage, and abandoned her then and there? Oh, would they feel pity for her, or contempt?

The servants, in livery, had taken their posts; everything was in readiness now to welcome the five hundred guests that were to arrive in advance of the bridal pair.

In her *boudoir*, the grand old lady-mother, resplendent in ivory-satin, rare old point lace and diamonds, was viewing herself critically in the long pier-glass that reached from ceiling to floor. Her daughter Margaret stood near her, arrayed in satin and tulle, with pearls white as moonbeams lying on her breast, clasping her white throat and arms, and twined among the meshes of her dark hair.

The contrast made poor Bernardine look strangely out of place in her plain gray cashmere dress, with its somber dark ribbons.

"You look quite tired, Miss Moore. I would suggest that you go into the grounds for a breath of fresh air before the guests arrive. Then I shall want you here," said Miss Gardiner, noticing how very white and drawn the girl's face looked.

Oh, how thankful she was to get away from them—away from the sight of the pomp and the splendor—to cry her heart out, all alone, for a few moments! With a grateful murmured "Thank you," she stepped from the long French window out on to the porch and down the private stair-way into the grounds.

Margaret Gardiner stepped to the window, drew aside the heavy lace curtains, and watched the dark, slim figure until it was lost to sight among the grand old

oak-trees.

It seemed to Bernardine that she had escaped just in time, for in another instant she would have cried out with the pain at her heart, with the awful agony that had taken possession of her.

One by one grand coaches began to roll up the long white road, turn in at the great stone gate-way, and rattle smartly up the serpentine drive to the broad porch.

Then they commenced to arrive scores at a time, and the air was filled with the ringing hoofs of hundreds of horses, the voices of coachmen and grooms, and the gay sound of laughter.

The din was so great no one heard the solitary little figure among the trees crying out to Heaven that she had counted beyond her strength in remaining there to witness the home-coming of the man she loved and his bride.

Suddenly she heard the sound of her own name.

"Miss Moore! Miss Moore! Where are you?" called one of the maids. "My lady is asking for you!"

"Tell your mistress I shall be there directly."

"Dear me! what an odd creature that Miss Moore is!" thought the maid, as she flew back to the house. "Instead of being in the house, enjoying the music and the grand toilets of the aristocracy that's here to-night, she's out in the loneliest part of the grounds. But, dear me! what an amazing goose I am to be sure. She must have a lover with her, and in that case the grove's a paradise. Too bad my lady was so imperative. I would have pretended that I couldn't find her—just yet."

Bernardine stooped down, and wetting her handkerchief in the brook, laved her face with it.

She dared not approach the grand old lady with her face swollen with tears, as she was sure it must be.

Bernardine found her quite beside herself with excitement.

"I heard the whistle of the incoming train some fifteen minutes ago, Miss Moore," she said. "My son has reached the station by this time. I have sent our

fastest team down to meet him. He will be here at any moment. Ah! that is his step I hear now in the corridor! I am trembling so with excitement that I can hardly stand. Do not leave, Miss Moore. I may need you in case this meeting is too much for me and I should faint away in his strong arms."

The footsteps that Bernardine remembered so well came nearer.

She pressed her hand tightly over her heart to still its wild beating.

Bernardine could have cried aloud in her agony; but her white lips uttered no moan, no sound, even when the door was flung open and a tall, handsome form sprung over the threshold.

"Where are you, mother?" cried Jay Gardiner. "The room is so dark that I can not see where you are!"

The next moment the proud, stately old lady was sobbing on the breast of the son she idolized.

She forgot that in the shadow of the alcove stood her companion; she forgot the existence of every one save her darling boy, whom she clasped so joyfully.

Bernardine watched him herself, unseen, her whole heart in her eyes, like one turned into stone.

His handsome face was pale, even haggard; the dark hair, that waved back from the broad brow, was the same; but his eyes—those bonny, sunny, laughing blue eyes—were sadly changed. There was an unhappy look in them, a restless expression, deepening almost into despair. There was a story of some kind in his face, a repressed passion and fire, a something Bernardine could not understand.

"I am not alone, you must remember, mother, dear," he said in his deep, musical voice. "I have brought some one else for you to welcome. Look up and greet my wife, mother."

Slowly the grand old lady unwound her arms from about the neck of her handsome, stalwart son, and turned rather fearfully toward the slender figure by her side.

At that moment young Mrs. Gardiner took a step forward, which brought her in the full glow of the lamp, and as Bernardine gazed, her heart sunk within her.

She saw, as the lovely young stranger threw back her gray silk traveling-cloak, a

slim, beautiful creature, with golden hair, round, dimpled face, flushed cheeks and lips, and the brightest of blue, sparkling eyes—a girl who looked like some dazzling picture painted by some old master, and who had just stepped out of a gilded frame. Her face was so lovely, that, as Bernardine gazed, her heart grew so heavy and strained with pain, that she thought it must surely break. *She was the same girl who had visited her at her humble home.*

The grand old lady took the haughty young beauty in her arms, calling her "daughter," and bidding her welcome to Gardiner Castle, her future home.

"Ah! no wonder the man I loved deserted me for this beautiful being all life, all sparkle, all fire," was the thought that rushed through Bernardine's breaking heart.

Then suddenly the old lady remembered her, and turned to her quickly, saying:

"Come forward, my dear girl. I wish to present my new companion to my son and his bride."

CHAPTER XLVI.

Bernardine stood still. She could not have moved one step forward if her life depended on it; and thinking she had not heard, the old lady turned to her, and repeated:

"I want my son and his wife to know you, my dear. You have been but a short time beneath this roof, but in that time you have made yourself so indispensable to me that I could not do without you."

Both Jay Gardiner and his wife glanced carelessly in the direction indicated by his mother.

The room was in such dense shadow that they only saw a tall, slim form in a dark dress that seemed to melt into and become a part of the darkness beyond.

They bowed slightly in the most thoughtless manner; then turned their attention to Mrs. Gardiner, who had commenced telling them how eagerly she had watched for their coming, and of the strange presentiment that something was going to happen.

That moment stood out forever afterward in the life of hapless Bernardine.

She thought that when her eyes rested on the face that had been all the world to her, she would fall dead at his feet. But she did not; nor did the slightest moan or cry escape her white lips.

She had expected that Jay Gardiner would cry out in wonder or in anger when he saw her; that he would recognize her with some show of emotion. But he only looked at her, and then turned as carelessly away as any stranger might have done. And in that moment, as she stood there, the very bitterness of death passed over her.

Mrs. Gardiner's next remark called their attention completely away from her, for which she was most thankful.

"Dear me, how very selfish I am!" exclaimed the grand old lady, in dismay. "I

had forgotten how time is flying. The guests will be wondering why you and your bride tarry so long, my dear boy. A servant will show you to your suite of rooms. Your luggage must have been already taken there. You will want to make your toilets. When you are ready to go down to the reception-room, let me know.

"Do not forget to wear all the Gardiner diamonds to-night, my dear," were the lady-mother's parting words. "Every one is expecting to see them on you. They are famous. You will create a sensation in them; you will bewilder, dazzle, and astonish these country folk."

Bernardine did not hear the young wife's reply. She would have given all she possessed to throw herself on her knees on the spot his feet had pressed and wept her very life out.

Ah! why had he wooed her in that never-to-be-forgotten past, made her love him, taken her heart from her, only to break it?

A moment later, Miss Margaret glided into the room and went straight up to her mother's side.

"I have just greeted and welcomed Jay and his bride, mamma," she said, speaking before her mother's companion quite as though she had not been present. But she paused abruptly as though she thought it best to cut the sentence short.

"Well," replied her mother, eagerly, "do you like Jay's bride, Margaret? You always form an opinion when you first meet a person, which usually proves to be correct."

"My brother does not look quite happy," replied Miss Margaret, slowly. "His bride is most beautiful—indeed, I have never met a young woman so strangely fascinating—but there is something about her that repels even while it draws me toward her."

"I experienced the same feeling, Margaret," returned Mrs. Gardiner. "But it seems to me only natural that we should experience such a sensation when looking upon the face of the woman who has taken first place in the heart of my only boy and your only brother. As to Jay not being quite happy, I think that is purely your imagination, Margaret. Theirs was a love match, and they are in the height of their honey-moon. Why should he not be happy, I ask you!"

"And I reply, mamma, that I do not know," replied Miss Margaret, thoughtfully.

"It is simply the way the expression of his face and his manners struck me. But I must hurry down to our guests again. Will you accompany me, mamma, that we may both be together to receive them in the drawing-room and present them?"

The young wife stood before the long French mirror, scarcely glancing at the superb picture she presented, as Antoinette, her maid, deftly put the finishing touches to her toilet.

"There is only one thing needed to make my lady fairly radiant to-night," declared Antoinette, in her low, purring voice, "and that is the diamonds. You will let me get them all and deck you with them—twine them about that superb white neck, those perfect arms and——"

"Hush!" exclaimed Sally, impatiently. "Didn't you hear me say I shouldn't wear the diamonds to-night."

Jay Gardiner, entering his wife's *boudoir* unexpectedly at that moment, could not help overhearing her remark.

His brow darkened, and a gleam of anger shot into his blue eyes. He stepped quickly to his wife's side.

"You *will* wear the diamonds!" he said in the most authoritative tone he had yet used to her. "You heard my mother express the wish that you should do so. Moreover, it has been the custom in our family for generations for brides to wear them at a reception given in honor of their home-coming."

With these words, he strode into his own room—an inner apartment—and closed the door after him with a bang.

Looking up into her young mistress's face, the shrewd Antoinette saw that she was greatly agitated, and pale as death. But she pretended not to notice it.

"Shall I not get the diamonds from your little hand-bag, my lady?" she asked, eagerly.

"No; you can not get them," cried Sally, hoarsely, her teeth chattering, her eyes fairly dilating with fright; "*they are not there!*"

CHAPTER XLVII.

Young Mrs. Gardiner stooped down until her lips were on a level with the maid's ear.

"My diamonds are not in the little leather hand-bag, Antoinette," she panted. "The hour has come when I must make a confidant of you, and ask you to help me, Antoinette. You are clever; your brain is full of resources; and you must help me out of this awful web that has tangled itself about me. I—I lost the diamonds on the night of the grand ball—the last night we were at Newport, and—and I dare not tell my husband. Now you see my position, Antoinette. I—I can not wear the diamonds, and I do not know how to turn my husband from his purpose of making me put them on. He may refuse to go down to the reception-room—or, still worse, he may ask for them. I can not see the end, Antoinette. I am between two fires. I do not know which way to leap to save myself. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, my lady," returned the wily maid. "Leave your trouble to me. I will find some way to get you out of it."

"You must think quickly, Antoinette!" cried Sally, excitedly. "He said he would return for me within ten minutes. Half that time has already passed. Oh—oh! what shall I do?"

"You must not excite yourself, my lady," replied Antoinette, quickly. "Worry brings wrinkles, and you can not afford to have any but pleasant thoughts. I have said you can rely upon me to think of some way out of the dilemma."

"That is easier said than done, Antoinette," declared her mistress, beginning to pace excitedly up and down the room, the color burning in two bright red spots on her cheeks.

Antoinette crossed over to the window, and stood looking out thoughtfully into the darkness. Her brain was busy with the numerous schemes that were flitting through it.

At that, moment fate pointed out an unexpected way to her. She heard footsteps in the corridor, and just then it flashed upon Antoinette that she had heard her master giving orders to his valet to bring him a glass of brandy. The man was returning with it.

Quick as a flash, Antoinette crossed the room and flung open the door.

"Andrew," she whispered to the man who was passing, "I want you to do a favor for me."

"A hundred if you like," replied the man, good-humoredly. "But I haven't time to listen to you now. I'll take master this brandy—which, by the way, is the best of its kind. I wish he'd take a notion to leave half of it in the glass, for it's fairly nectar—then I'll be back in a trice, and you can consider me at your service for the rest of the evening."

"But it's *now* I want you, Andrew—this very minute!" cried Antoinette. "Set your glass right down here; nobody will see it; I'll keep guard over it. My errand won't take you more than a minute. Master won't miss his brandy for that short time. He'll enjoy it all the more when he gets it."

Andrew hesitated an instant, and we all know what happens to the man who hesitates—he is lost.

"Well, what is it you want, Antoinette?" he replied, good-humoredly. "If it only takes me a minute, as you say, I don't mind accommodating you."

"I lost my little gold cross in the lower hall a few moments ago. I heard something drop as I was hurrying along, but did not miss it until just now, and I can't leave my lady to go and get it. Some one may come along and find it, and I'd never get it again. For goodness' sake, go quick, Andrew, and look for it. Not an instant's to be lost."

Suspecting nothing, the good fellow hurriedly set down the glass, and hastened away to do her bidding.

His back was scarcely turned ere Antoinette flew to her own apartments, which adjoined her mistress's, and took from a trunk, which she unlocked with a very strange-looking key, a small vial. A few grains of the contents she emptied into the palm of her hand, and in less time than it takes to write it, they were transferred to the glass of brandy and dissolved at once with its amber contents.

She had scarcely accomplished this ere Andrew returned, quite flushed from hurrying.

"I am sorry to bring you bad news, Antoinette," he said; "but some one has been there before me and picked up your cross. I met the butler, and we both searched for it. He has promised to make strict inquiries concerning it, and get it back for you if it be possible."

"You are very good to take so much trouble upon yourself," declared Antoinette, with a well-enacted sigh. "I suppose I shall survive the loss of it. It is a trinket that isn't of much value only as a keep-sake. But I won't keep you standing there talking any longer, Andrew; your master will be waiting for the brandy."

"I'll see you later, Antoinette," he said, nodding as he picked up his glass.

The next moment he had disappeared within his master's apartments.

When she returned to her mistress she found Mrs. Gardiner in a state of nervousness.

"The time is almost up, and you have devised no plan as yet, Antoinette," she cried, wringing her hands. "See! the ten minutes have almost elapsed. Oh—oh! what shall I do?"

"Monsieur will not come in ten minutes' time, my lady," replied the maid, with a knowing nod; "nor will he go to the reception. There was but one way out of it," declared Antoinette. "If he came after you to go down to the reception, the diamonds would have to be produced, so I said to myself he must not come, he must be prevented at all hazards. I knew of but one way, and acted upon the thought that came to me. Monsieur had ordered some brandy; I intercepted the valet, sent him off on a fool's errand, holding the glass until he returned, and while he was gone I put a heavy sleeping potion, which I often take for the toothache, in monsieur's glass of brandy. After taking it, he will fall into a deep sleep, from which no one will be able to awake him. The consequence is, he will not come for my lady to take her down to the reception to-night, and she is free to suit herself as to whether she will wear diamonds or not. No other occasion for wearing them may take place for some time. I will think of something else by that time."

"You have saved me, Antoinette!" cried the guilty woman, sinking down upon the nearest chair and trembling with excitement. "Oh, how can I ever thank

you!"

"If my lady would do something in the way of raising my pay, I would be much obliged," replied the girl, her black eyes glittering.

She knew the trembling woman before her was in her power. The game had been commenced, the first trump had been played, and Antoinette meant to win all in the end.

"I shall be only too glad to do so," returned Sally, realizing for the first time the unpleasantness of being dictated to by her maid.

"And if madame would make me a present of some money to-night, I could make excellent use of it."

"I haven't any ready money just now," returned Sally, a dull red flush creeping over the whiteness of her face. "I have spent all last month's allowance, and it's only the middle of the month now."

"I would take the gold chain in the jewel-case which madame never wears," replied the girl, boldly.

"Antoinette, you are a fiend!" cried Sally Gardiner, starting to her feet in a rage. "How dare you expect that I would give you my gold chain, girl?"

"Madame could not afford to refuse my request," answered the girl. "If she wants me to keep her secret, she must pay well. The service I have rendered to-night is worth what I ask."

"Take the chain," said young Mrs. Gardiner, with a short gasp. "I—I shall not need your services after to-night. Take the chain, and—go!"

"So, so, madame!" cried the girl. "That is the way you would repay me for what I have done, for you? Discharge Antoinette, eh? Oh, no, my lady; you will think better of those hasty words, especially as I have a suspicion of where madame's diamonds have gone."

"I lost them at the ball that night in Newport," cried Sally, springing hastily to her feet, and facing the girl, her temper at a white heat.

"Monsieur Victor Lamont was with my lady when she lost them," returned Antoinette, softly. "She wore them when she entered the carriage on the beach that night, and she returned at day-break without them. You would not like

monsieur to know of that romantic little episode, eh?"

"I repeat, you are a fiend incarnate!" gasped Sally, trembling like an aspen leaf.

"My lady sees it would be better to temporize with Antoinette than to make an enemy of her. She will think better of discharging one whose assistance may prove valuable to her. I will say no more. They are coming to see what detains madame and her husband, little dreaming what is in store for them."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

At that moment Andrew, the valet, came flying out of his master's room.

"Oh, Miss Margaret! Miss Margaret!" he cried, hoarsely, "how can I ever tell you what had happened? But it was a mistake—indeed it was all a mistake! I do not see how I ever came to do it!"

Margaret Gardiner hurriedly caught the man's arm in a firm grasp, looking sternly in his face.

"Andrew," she said, with great calmness, "stop that shouting, and tell me instantly what the matter is. Has—has—anything happened my brother or—or his wife?"

Her quiet tone brought the valet to his senses more quickly than anything else could have done.

"Yes, I'll tell you, Miss Margaret," he answered, hoarsely; "and though master turns me off to-morrow for it, I swear to you earnestly that it was all a terrible mistake."

"What has happened?" repeated Miss Margaret, sternly. "Get to the point at once, Andrew."

"It was this way, Miss Margaret," he cried. "Master sent me for a glass of brandy. I brought it to him. He always likes a few drops of cordial put in it, and I went to his dresser, where I had placed the cordial a few minutes before, took up the bottle hurriedly, and shook in a generous quantity. Now it happened that I had also taken out a bottle of drops—quieting drops which master had been taking for the last two nights for a violent toothache—it is a powerful narcotic—to make him sleep and forget his pain, he told me. I—I—don't know how I could have done it; I—I was not conscious of doing it; but somehow I must have put the drops instead of the cordial into his brandy, for he has fallen into a deep sleep, from which I am unable to awaken him."

"Thank Heaven, it is no worse!" sobbed Miss Margaret. "I—I was afraid some

terrible accident had happened."

While he was speaking, Sally had run into the corridor and made the pretense of listening to the valet's dilemma, while Antoinette stood back in the shadow laughing to herself at the strange way fate or fortune or luck, or whatever it was, had played into her clever hands.

This was, indeed, an unexpected dilemma. Following the valet into her brother's apartments, she found Andrew's statement indeed true—her brother was in a sound sleep, from which all their efforts were futile to awake him.

"There is nothing else to be done but to go down without him," she said at length in despair, turning to Sally. "The effect of the potion ought to wear off in an hour or so, then he can join the guests."

The entrance of Miss Margaret and the bride created quite a sensation; but when the former explained the ludicrous mistake which caused the doctor's temporary absence from them, their mirth burst all bounds, and the very roof of the grand old mansion shook with peal after peal of hearty laughter.

So the fun and merriment went on until he should join them, and the happy, dazzling, beautiful young bride was the petted queen of the hour.

Old Mrs. Gardiner was greatly disappointed because her beautiful daughter-in-law did not wear the famous family diamonds, but when Sally slipped up to her and whispered that she had forgotten, in her excitement over Jay's mishap, to don them, the old lady was mollified.

The evening ran its length, and ended at last. Midnight had come, giving place to a new moon, and in the wee sma' hours the festive guests had taken their departure, each wishing with a jolly little laugh, to be remembered to their host when he should awake. The lights were out in the magnificent drawing-room and in the corridor.

Young Mrs. Gardiner was at last in her own *boudoir*, in the hands of Antoinette.

It was generally late in the morning when those pretty blue eyes opened. But it was little more than daylight when Antoinette came to her couch, grasped hurriedly the pink-and-white arm that lay on the lace coverlet, saying, hoarsely:

"You are wanted, my lady. You must come at once. Master is worse; that is, he is sleeping more heavily than ever. Miss Margaret did not leave his side all night,

Andrew tells me, and she says the nearest doctor must be sent for. I thought it would look better if you were at his bedside, too, when the doctor came."

"You did quite right to awaken me, Antoinette," replied young Mrs. Gardiner. "Get me my morning robe, and slippers to match, at once, and take my hair out of these curl-papers. One can not appear before one's husband's relatives without making a careful toilet and looking one's best, for their Argus eyes are sure to take in any defects. I hope my husband will not have a long sickness or anything like that. I can not endure a sick-room. I think I should go mad. Hurry, Antoinette! Arrange my toilet as quickly as possible. I shall go into the grounds for a breath of fresh air before I venture into the heated atmosphere of that room, in which no doubt the lamps are still burning."

"I would advise you *not* to go into the grounds, my lady," replied Antoinette, quietly.

"Why, I should like to know?" asked young Mrs. Gardiner, very sharply.

"I have a reason for what I say," returned Antoinette; "but it is best not to tell you —just now."

"I demand to know!" declared her mistress.

"If you *must* know, I suppose I may as well tell you now as at any other time, my lady," replied Antoinette; "though the news I have to tell may make you a trifle nervous, I fear. I was just out in the grounds gathering roses for your vase, when, to my astonishment, I heard my name called softly, but very distinctly, from the direction of a little brook which runs through the grounds scarcely more than a hundred feet from the hedge where the roses grew that I was gathering. I turned quickly in that direction. At first I saw no one, and I was about to turn away, believing my ears must have deceived me, when suddenly the tall alder-bushes parted, and a man stepped forth, beckoning to me, and that man, my lady, was— Mr. Victor Lamont!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

Sally Gardiner grew deathly pale as Antoinette's words fell upon her ear. Had she heard aright, or were her ears playing her a horrible trick?

"Mr. Victor Lamont is in the grounds, my lady, hiding among the thick alder-bushes down by the brook, and he vows he will stay there, be it day, week, month, or year, until he gets an opportunity to see and speak with you."

"You must manage to see him at once, Antoinette, and give him a message from me. Tell him I will see him to-morrow night—at—at midnight, down by the brook-side. I can not, I dare not, come before that, lest I might attract the attention of the inmates of the house. If—if he should question you about my affairs, or, in fact, about anything, make answer that you do not know to all inquiries—all questions. Be off at once, Antoinette. Delays are dangerous, you know."

As soon as she found herself alone, young Mrs. Gardiner turned the key in the lock, and flew at once to her writing-desk. Antoinette had laid several letters upon it. The letters—the writing upon two of which seemed rather familiar to her—were from the gentlemen who had loaned her the money a short time before at Newport. One stated that he should be in that vicinity at the end of the week, asking if she could find it convenient to pay part of the loan he had made to her when he called upon her. The other letter stated that the writer would be obliged if she could pay the money to his daughter when it became due. "She is a great friend of Miss Margaret Gardiner's," he went on to state, "and has decided to accept an invitation to spend a fortnight at the mansion, and would arrive there the following week."

Sally Gardiner tore both letters into shreds, and cast them from her with a laugh that was terrible to hear.

"I shall trust my wit to see me safely through this affair," she muttered. "I do not know just how it is to be done, but I shall accomplish it somehow."

There was a tap at the door. Thrusting the letters quickly in her desk, she closed

the lid, securely locked it, and put the key in the pocket of her dress.

She was about to say "Come in," when she suddenly remembered that she had fastened the door. When she opened it, she found Andrew, her husband's valet, standing there with a very white, troubled face.

"I am sorry to hurry you, my lady," he said in a tremulous voice; "but master seems so much worse we are sore afraid for him. Miss Margaret bids me summon you without a moment's delay."

"I shall be there directly," replied the young wife; and the valet wondered greatly at the cool way in which she took the news of her husband's serious condition.

"Those pretty society young women have no hearts," he thought, indignantly. "She married my poor young master for his money, not for love; that is quite evident to me."

Young Mrs. Gardiner was just about to leave her *boudoir*, when Antoinette returned.

"You saw him and delivered my message?" said Sally, anxiously.

"Oh, yes, my lady," returned the girl.

"Well," said Sally, expectantly, "what did he say?"

"He was raving angry, my lady," laughed Antoinette. "He swore as I told him all; but at length he cooled down, seeing that his rage did not mend matters. 'Take this to your mistress, my good girl,' he said, tearing a leaf from his memorandum-book, and scribbling hastily, upon it. Here it is, my lady."

As she spoke, she thrust a crumpled bit of paper into young Mrs. Gardiner's trembling hand.

There was no date; the note contained but a few lines, and read as follows:

"I shall be by the alder-bushes at midnight to-morrow night, and shall expect you to be equally punctual. No subterfuge, please. If for any reason you should fail to keep your appointment, I shall call upon you directly after breakfast the following morning, and shall see you—*at any cost*!

"LAMONT."

She would not give herself any worry until she stood face to face with Victor Lamont; then some sort of an excuse to put him off would be sure to come to her.

There was another tap at the door. It was Andrew again, standing on the threshold, shaking like an aspen leaf.

"Pardon me, my lady; Miss Margaret begs me to urge you to make all possible haste."

"I am coming now," she answered; and, looking into her face, Andrew marveled at the indifferent expression on it, and at the harshness of her voice.

She followed him without another word. A frightened cry broke from her lips as she hastily crossed the room, and bent over the couch on which her husband lay.

He was marble white, and looked so strange, she thought he was certainly dying.

"We have sent for all the doctors about here. They are expected every moment," said Miss Margaret, touching her sister-in-law on the arm. "I thought that in a consultation they would find some way to save him if it lay in human power."

Sally looked up in affright into the calm white face beside her. She tried to speak, but no sound fell from her cold, parched lips.

When the great doctors came, they would find that Jay Gardiner had not taken the mild sleeping draught which poor Andrew believed he had administered to him by mistake; but, instead, a most powerful drug, an overdose of which meant death. Yes, they would find it out, and then—— She dared not think what would happen then.

"I have been looking carefully into this affair," continued Miss Margaret, in that same calm, clear voice, "and I have reason to believe there is something terribly wrong here. I have often taken the same drops for sleeplessness that Andrew says has been administered to my brother, and it never produced that effect upon

me, and on several cases I have taken an overdose."

"I—I—suppose—the—the—drug—acts differently upon different constitutions," answered young Mrs. Gardiner.

Her eyes seemed fairly glued upon the still, white face lying back on the not whiter pillow. She could not have removed her gaze if her very life had been at stake.

"I have a strange theory," continued Miss Margaret, slowly, and in that terribly calm voice that put Sally's nerves on edge. "A very strange theory."

Margaret Gardiner saw her sister-in-law start suddenly and gasp for breath, and her face grew alarmingly white as she answered, hoarsely:

"A theory of—of—how your brother's condition came about!" she gasped, rather than spoke the words. "Then you—you—do not—believe—Andrew's—statement?"

"No!" replied Margaret Gardiner, in that same high, clear, solemn voice that seemed to vibrate through every pore of Sally's body. "I think Andrew fully believes what he states to be the truth; but he has not deceived. He has been most cleverly fooled by some one else."

"What—what—makes you—think that?" cried Sally, sharply. "Those are strong words and a strange accusation to make, Miss Margaret."

"I am quite well aware of that," was the slow reply.

And as Jay's sister uttered the words, Sally could feel the strong gaze which accompanied them burn like fire to the very depths of her beating heart.

What did Margaret Gardiner suspect? Surely, she would never think of suspecting that she—his bride—had any hand in Jay's illness? There would be no apparent reason.

"Shall I tell you whom I suspect knows more of this than——"

"Doctor Baker, miss," announced one of the servants; and the coming of the famous old doctor put a stop to all further conversation for the present, much to Sally's intense relief.

CHAPTER L.

Young Mrs. Gardiner looked fearfully and eagerly into the face of the stern-countenanced old doctor who had just entered and had stepped up hurriedly to his patient's bedside.

He had heard from the messenger who had come for him just what had occurred to Jay Gardiner, and he was greatly puzzled.

"The toothache drops you speak of were compounded by me," he declared, "and they certainly do not act as you describe. Ten drops would produce balmy sleep. An overdose acts as an emetic, and would not remain a moment's time on the stomach. That is their chief virtue—in rendering an overdose harmless. I am confident the mischief can not lie with the toothache drops."

Doctor Baker had entered and gone directly to the bedside of his patient, as we have said, simply nodding to Miss Margaret, and not waiting for an introduction to the bride. The moment his eyes fell upon his patient, he gave a start of surprise.

"Ah," he muttered, "my case of instruments! Hand them to me quickly. This is a case of life or death! Not an instant's time is to be lost. I dare not wait for the coming of the consulting physicians who have been sent for."

"What are you about to do?" cried Sally, springing forward, her eyes gleaming.

"I am about to perform a critical operation to save my patient's life, if it be possible. Every instant of time is valuable."

"I say it shall not be done!" cried young Mrs. Gardiner. "I, his wife, command that you do not proceed until the rest of the doctors sent for arrive and sanction such an action!"

The old doctor flushed hotly. Never, in all the long years of his practice, had his medical judgment ever been brought into question before, and at first, anger and resentment rose in quick rebellion in his heart; the next instant he had reasoned with himself that this young wife should be pardoned for her words, which had

been uttered in the greatest stress of excitement.

"My dear Mrs. Gardiner—for such I presume you to be—your interference at this critical moment, attempting to thwart my judgment, would—ay, I say *would*—prove fatal to your husband. This is a moment when a physician must act upon his own responsibility, knowing that a human life depends upon his swiftness and his skill, I beg of you to leave all to me."

"I say it shall not be!" cried Sally, flinging herself across her husband's prostrate body. "Touch him at your peril, Doctor Baker!"

For an instant all in the apartment were almost dumbfounded. Miss Margaret was the first to recover herself.

"Sally," she said, approaching her sister-in-law slowly, her blue eyes looking stealthily down into the glittering, frenzied green ones, "come with me. You want to save Jay's life, don't you? Put down that knife, and come with me. You are wasting precious moments that may mean life or death to the one we both love. Let me plead with you, on my knees, if need be, to come with me, dear."

Sally Gardiner stood at bay like a lioness. Quick as a flash, she had thought out the situation.

If Jay Gardiner died, she would be free to fly with Victor Lament. If she refused to allow the doctor to touch him, he would die, and never discover the loss of the diamonds, or that she had borrowed money from his friends on leaving Newport.

If he died, she would be a wealthy woman for life, and she would never be obliged to look again into the face of the handsome husband whom she hated—the husband who hated her, and who did not take the pains to conceal it in his every act each day since he had married her.

Ah! if he only died here and now it would save her from all the ills that menaced her and were closing in around her. This was her opportunity. Fate—fortune had put the means of saving herself in her hands.

Even the good doctor was sorely perplexed. He saw that young Mrs. Gardiner was a desperate woman, and that she meant what she said.

"Will nothing under Heaven cause you to relent?" cried Margaret, wringing her hands, her splendid courage breaking down completely under the great strain of her agony. "My poor mother lies in the next room in a death-like swoon, caused

by the knowledge of her idolized son's fatal illness. If he should die, she would never see another morning's sun after she learned of it. One grave would cover both."

CHAPTER LI.

We must now return to Bernardine, dear reader.

"Oh, I was mad—mad to remain a single instant beneath this roof when I discovered whose home it was!" she moaned, sinking down on the nearest hassock and rocking herself to and fro in an agony of despair. "I—I could have lived my life better if I had not looked upon his face again, or seen the bride who had won his love from me. I will go, I will leave this grand house at once. Let them feast and make merry. None of them knows that a human heart so near them is breaking slowly under its load of woe."

She tried to rise and cross the floor, but her limbs refused to act. A terrible numbness had come over them, every muscle of her body seemed to pain her.

"Am I going to be ill?" she cried out to herself in the wildest alarm. "No, no—that *must not* be; they would be sure to call upon *him* to—to aid me, and that would kill me—yes, kill me!"

Her body seemed to burn like fire, while her head, her feet, and her hands were ice cold. Her lips were parched with a terrible thirst.

"I must go away from here," she muttered. "If I am going to die, let it be out in the grounds, with my face pressed close to the cold earth, that is not more cold to me than the false heart of the man to whom I have given my love beyond recall."

Like one whose sight had suddenly grown dim, Bernardine groped her way from the magnificent *boudoir* out into the corridor, her one thought being to reach her own apartment, secure her bonnet and cloak, and get out of the house. She had scarcely reached the first turn in the corridor, ere she came face to face with a woman robed in costly satin, and all ablaze with diamonds, who was standing quite still and looking about her in puzzled wonder.

"I—I beg your pardon, miss," said the stranger, addressing Bernardine. "I am a bit turned around in this labyrinth of corridors."

What was there in that voice that caused Bernardine to forget her own sorrows

for an instant, and with a gasp peer into the face looking up into her own?

The effect of Bernardine's presence, as the girl turned her head and the light of the hanging-lamp fell full upon it, was quite as electrifying to the strange lady.

"Bernardine Moore!" she gasped in a high, shrill voice that was almost hysterical. "Do my eyes deceive me, or is this some strange coincidence, some chance resemblance, or are you Bernardine Moore, whom I have searched the whole earth over to find?"

At the first word that fell from her excited lips, Bernardine recognized Miss Rogers.

"Yes," she answered, mechanically, "I am Bernardine Moore, and you are Miss Rogers. But—but how came you here, and in such fine dress and magnificent jewels? You, whom I knew to be as poor as ourselves, when you shared the humble tenement home with my father and me!"

Miss Rogers laughed very softly.

"I can well understand your bewilderment over such a Cinderella-like mystery. The solution of it is very plain, however. But before I answer your question, my dear Bernardine, I must ask what *you* are doing beneath this roof?"

"I am Mrs. Gardiner's paid companion," responded Bernardine, huskily.

"And I am Mrs. Gardiner's guest, surprising as that may seem. But let us step into some quiet nook where we can seat ourselves and talk without interruption," said Miss Rogers. "I have much to ask you about, and much to tell you."

"Will you come to my apartment?" asked Bernardine.

The little old lady nodded, the action of her head setting all her jewels to dancing like points of flame.

Bernardine led the way to the modestly furnished room almost opposite Mrs. Gardiner's, and drawing forward a chair for her companion, placed her in it with the same gentle kindness she had exhibited toward poor, old, friendless Miss Rogers in those other days.

"Before I say anything, my dear," began Miss Rogers, "I want to know just what took place from the moment you fled from your father's humble home up to the present time. Did you—elope with any one?"

She saw the girl's fair face flush, then grow pale; but the dark, true, earnest eyes of Bernardine did not fall beneath her searching gaze.

"I am grieved that you wrong me to that extent, Miss Rogers," she answered, slowly. "No, I did not elope. I simply left the old tenement house because I could not bear my father's entreaties to hurry up the approaching marriage between the man I hated—Jasper Wilde—and myself. The more I thought of it, the more repugnant it became to me.

"I made my way down to the river. I did not heed how cold and dark it was. I—I took one leap, crying out to God to be merciful to me, and then the dark waters, with the awful chill of death upon them, closed over me, and I went down—down—and I knew no more.

"But Heaven did not intend that I should die then. I still had more misery to go through; for that was I saved. I was rescued half drowned—almost lifeless—and taken to an old nurse's home, where I lay two weeks hovering between life and death.

"On the very day I regained consciousness, I learned about the terrible fire that had wiped out the tenement home which I had known since my earliest childhood, and that my poor, hapless father had perished in the flames.

"I did my best to discover your whereabouts, Miss Rogers, at first fearing you had shared my poor father's fate; but this fear proved to be without foundation, for the neighbors remembered seeing you go out to mail a letter a short time before the fire broke out.

"I felt that some day we should meet again, but I never dreamed that it would be like this."

"Have you told me *all*, Bernardine?" asked Miss Rogers, slowly. "You are greatly changed, child. When you fled from your home, you were but a school-girl, *now* you are a woman. What has wrought so great a change in so short a time?"

"I can not tell you that, Miss Rogers," answered Bernardine, falteringly. "That is a secret I must keep carefully locked up in my breast until the day I die!" she said, piteously.

"I am sorry you will not intrust your secret to me," replied Miss Rogers. "You shall never have reason to repent of any faith you place in me."

"There are some things that are better left untold," sobbed Bernardine. "Some wounds where the cruel weapons that made them have not yet been removed. This is one of them."

"Is love, the sweetest boon e'er given to women, and yet the bitterest woe to many, the rock on which you wrecked your life, child? Tell me that much."

"Yes," sobbed Bernardine. "I loved, and was—cruelly—deceived!"

"Oh, do not tell me that!" cried Miss Rogers. "I can not bear it. Oh, Heaven! that you, so sweet, and pure, and innocent, should fall a victim to a man's wiles! Oh, tell me, Bernardine, that I have not heard aright!"

Miss Rogers was so overcome by Bernardine's story, that she could not refrain from burying her face in her hands and bursting into tears as the girl's last words fell on her startled ear.

CHAPTER LII.

Tears were falling from Bernardine's eyes and sobs were trembling on the tender lips, she could restrain her feelings no longer, and, catching up the thin, shriveled-up figure of the dear little old spinster in her arms, she strained her to her heart and wept.

"Ah, my dear girl. *You* are the good angel who took me in and cared for me, believing me to be a pauper.

"And now know the truth, my darling Bernardine. I, your distant kinswoman, am very rich, far above your imagination. I have searched for you since that fire, to make you my *heiress*—heiress to three millions of money. Can you realize it?"

Bernardine was looking at her with startled eyes, her white lips parted in dismay.

"Now you can understand better why I am here as the guest of Margaret Gardiner and her proud mother? The wealthy Miss Rogers, of New York, is believed to be a valuable acquisition to any social gathering. I loved your mother, my fair, sweet, gentle cousin. I should love you for her sake, did I not love you for your own."

"You will make the necessary arrangements to leave Mrs. Gardiner's employ at the earliest moment, my dear, for I wish you to take your place in society at once as my heiress."

But much to Miss Rogers' surprise, Bernardine shook her head sadly.

"Oh, do not be angry with me, dear Miss Rogers," she sobbed, "but it can never be. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kind intentions, but it can never be. Heaven did not wish me to be a favorite of fortune. There are those who are born to work for a living. I am one of them. I have no place in the homes of aristocrats. One fell in love with me, but he soon tired of me and deserted me."

"He will be glad enough to seek you again when you are known as my heiress," declared Miss Rogers, patting softly the bowed, dark curly head.

"No, no!" cried Bernardine; "if a man can not love you when you are poor, friendless and homeless, he can not love you with all the trappings of wealth about you. I say again, I thank you with all my heart and soul for what you are disposed to do for me; but I can not accept it at your hands, dear friend. Build churches, schools for little ones, homes for the aged and helpless, institutions for the blind, hospitals for those stricken low by the dread rod of disease. I am young and strong. I can earn my bread for many a long year yet. Work is the only panacea to keep me from thinking, thinking, thinking."

"Nay, nay," replied Miss Rogers; "let me be a judge of that. I know best, my dear. It will be a happiness to me in my declining years to have you do as I desire. The money will all go to you, and at the last you may divide it as you see fit. Do not refuse me, my child. I have set my heart upon seeing you the center of an admiring throng, to see you robed in shining satin and magnificent diamonds. I will not say more upon the subject just now; we will discuss it—to-morrow. I shall go down and join the feasters and revelers; my heart is happy now that I have found you, Bernardine. Early to-morrow morning we will let Mrs. Gardiner and her daughter Margaret into our secret, and they will make no objection to my taking you quietly away with me—at once. Do not let what I have told you keep you awake to-night, child. I should feel sorry to see you look pale and haggard to-morrow, instead of bright and cheerful."

With a kiss, she left Bernardine, and the girl stood looking after her long afterward, wondering if what she had just passed through was not a dream from which she would awaken presently.

The air of the room seemed to stifle Bernardine. Rising slowly, she made her way through one of the long French windows out into the grounds, and took a path which led in the direction of the brook around which the alders grew so thickly.

She was so preoccupied with her own thoughts, she hardly noticed which way her footsteps tended. All she realized was, that she was walking in the sweet, rose-laden grounds, away—far away—from the revelers, with the free, cool, pure air of Heaven blowing across her heated, feverish brow.

"An heiress!" She said the words over and over again to herself, trying to picture to herself what the life of an heiress would be.

If she had been an heiress, living in a luxurious, beautiful home, would Jay Gardiner have deserted her in that cruel, bitterly cruel, heartless fashion?

She never remembered to have heard or read of the lover of a wealthy heiress deserting her. It was always the lovers of poor girls who dared play such tricks.

How shocked Jay Gardiner would be when he heard that she was—an heiress!

Would he regret the step he had taken? The very thought sent a strange chill through her heart.

The next instant she had recovered herself.

"No, no! There will be no regrets between us now," she sobbed, hiding her white face in her trembling hands. "For he is another's and can never be anything more to me save a bitter-sweet memory. To-night I will give my pent-up grief full vent. Then I will bury it deep—deep out of the world's sight, and no one shall ever know that my life has been wrecked over—what might have been."

Slowly her trembling hands dropped from her face, and, with bowed head, Bernardine went slowly down the path, out of the sound of the dance-music and the laughing voices, down to where the crickets were chirping amid the long grasses, and the wind was moaning among the tall pines and the thick alders.

When she reached the brook she paused. It was very deep at this point—nearly ten feet, she had heard Miss Margaret say—and the bottom was covered with sharp, jagged rocks. That was what caused the hoarse, deep murmur as the swift-flowing water struck them in its hurried flight toward the sea.

Bernardine leaned heavily against one of the tall pines, and gave vent to her grief.

Why had God destined one young girl to have youth, beauty, wealth, and love, while the other had known only life's hardships? Miss Rogers' offer of wealth had come to her too late. It could not buy that which was more to her than everything else in the world put together—Jay Gardiner's love.

The companionship of beautiful women, the homage of noble men, were as nothing to her. She would go through life with a dull, aching void in her breast. There would always be a longing cry in her heart that would refuse to be stilled. No matter where she went, whom she met, the face of Jay Gardiner, as she had seen it first—the laughing, dark-blue eyes and the bonny brown curls—would haunt her memory while her life lasted.

"Good-bye, my lost love! It is best that you and I should never meet again!" she

sobbed.

Suddenly she became aware that she was not standing there alone. Scarcely ten feet from her she beheld the figure of a man, and she realized that he was regarding her intently.

CHAPTER LIII.

For a single instant Bernardine felt her terror mastering her; it was certainly not an idle fear conjured up by her own excited brain.

The clock from an adjacent tower struck the hour of midnight as she stood there by the brookside, peering, with beating heart, among the dense shadow of the trees.

She gazed with dilated eyes. Surely it was her fancy. One of the shadows, which she had supposed to be a stunted tree, moved, crept nearer and nearer, until it took the form of a man moving stealthily toward her.

Bernardine's first impulse was to turn and fly; but her limbs seemed powerless to move.

Yes, it was a man. She saw that he was moving more quickly forward now, and in a moment of time he had reached her side, and halted directly before her.

"Ah!" he cried in a voice that had a very Frenchy accent. "I am delighted to see you, my dear lady. Fate has certainly favored me, or, perhaps, my note reached you and you are come in search of me. Very kind—very considerate. They are having a fine time up at the mansion yonder in your honor, of course. Knowing your *penchant* for lights, music, laughter, and admiration, I confess I am *very* much surprised to see that you have stolen a few minutes to devote to—me."

Bernardine realized at once that this stranger mistook her for some one else—some one who had expected to see him. She tried to wrench herself free from the steel-like grasp of his fingers, that had closed like a vise about her slender wrist; but not a muscle responded to her will, nor could she find voice to utter a single sound.

"Let us come to an understanding, my dear Mrs. Gardiner. I do not like this new move on your part."

It was then, and not till then, that Bernardine found her voice.

"I am not Mrs. Gardiner!" she exclaimed, struggling to free herself from the man's detaining hold on her arm.

The effect of her words was like an electric shock to the man. He reeled back as though he had been suddenly shot.

"You—are—not—young Mrs. Gardiner?" he gasped, his teeth fairly chattering. "Then, by Heaven! you are a spy, sent here by her to incriminate me, to be a witness against me! It was a clever scheme, but she shall see that it will fail signally."

"I am no spy!" replied Bernardine, indignantly, "No one sent me here, least of all, young Mrs. Gardiner!"

"I do not believe you!" retorted the man, bluntly. "At any rate, you know too much of this affair to suit me. You must come along with me."

"You are mad!" cried Bernardine, haughtily. "I have, as you say, unwittingly stumbled across some secret in the life of yourself and one who has won the love of a man any woman would have been proud to have called—husband!"

"So you are in love with the handsome, lordly Jay, eh?" sneered her companion. "It's a pity you had not captured the washing millionaire, instead of pretty, bewitching, coquettish Sally," he went on, with a fit of harsh laughter.

"Sir, unhand me and let me go!" cried Bernardine. "Your words are an insult! Leave me at once, or I shall cry out for help!"

"I believe you would be fool-hardy enough to attempt it," responded her companion; "but I intend to nip any such design in the bud. You must come along with me, I say. If you are wise, you will come along peaceably. Attempt to make an outcry, and—well, I never yet felled a woman, but there's always the first time. You invite the blow by going contrary to my commands. My carriage is in waiting, fortunately, just outside the thicket yonder."

Bernardine saw that the man she had to deal with was no ordinary person. He meant every word that he said. She tried to cry out to Heaven to help her in this, her hour of need, but her white lips could form no word.

Suddenly she felt herself lifted in a pair of strong arms, a hand fell swiftly over her mouth, and she knew no more. Sky, trees, the dark, handsome, swarthy face above her and the earth beneath her seemed to rock and reel.

Carrying his burden swiftly along a path almost covered by tangled underbrush, the man struck at length into a little clearing at one side of the main road. Here, as he had said, a horse and buggy were in waiting.

A lighted lantern was in the bottom of the vehicle. He swung this into the unconscious girl's face as he thrust her upon the seat. He had expected to see one of the servants of the mansion—a seamstress, or one of the maids, perhaps—but he was totally unprepared for the vision of girlish loveliness that met his gaze.

While he had gazed with fascinated eyes at the faultlessly beautiful face of Bernardine, his heart had gone from him in one great, mad throb of passionate love.

"This lovely bird has walked directly into my drag-net," he muttered. "Why should she not be mine, whether she loves or *hates* me?"

CHAPTER LIV.

On and on the dark-browed stranger urges the almost thoroughly exhausted horse, until after an hour's hard driving he comes upon a small farm-house standing in the midst of a clearing in the dense wood.

Here he drew rein, uttering a loud "Halloo!"

In answer to his summons, two men and a woman came hurrying forward, one of the men going toward the horse.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed the woman, amazedly, "Victor Lament has brought the young woman with him."

"No comments!" exclaimed Lamont, harshly, as he lifted his unconscious burden out of the buggy.

"And why not, pray?" demanded the woman, impudently. "Why should I not make comments when my husband is your pal in all your schemes; that is, he does the work while you play the fine gentleman, and he doesn't get half of the money by a long shot?"

"But I insist upon knowing now," declared the woman. "Who is the girl you are carrying in your arms, and why have you brought her here—of all places in the world?"

By this time they had reached the house, and Lamont strode in and laid his unconscious burden upon a wooden settee, which was the only article of furniture the apartment possessed.

"Why don't you answer, Victor Lamont?" cried the woman, shrilly. "Ten to one it's some girl whose puny, pretty face has fascinated you, and you're in love with her."

"Well, supposing that is the case," he replied, coolly; "what then?"

"I would say your fool-hardiness had got the better of your reason," she replied.

"That is the case with most men who do so foolish a thing as to fall in love," he answered, carelessly.

"Keep an eye on the girl, and do not let her leave this farm-house until after our work around here is done."

"I will promise under one condition," replied his companion; "and that is that you will not attempt to see the girl, or speak to her."

"Do you think I am a fool?" retorted Lamont.

"I do not think; I am certain of it—where a pretty face is concerned," responded the woman, quickly and blandly.

"I shall make no promises," he said, rudely turning on his heel. "Attend to the girl; she is recovering consciousness. You *dare not* permit her to escape, no matter what you say to the contrary. I must return to the Gardiner mansion to direct the movements of the boys. They will be waiting for me. Order a fresh horse saddled, and be quick about it. I've already wasted too much time listening to your recriminations."

Very reluctantly the woman turned to do his bidding. She saw that she had gone far enough. His mood had changed from a reflective to an angry one, and Victor Lamont was a man to fear when he was in a rage.

As soon as the woman had quitted the room, Lamont returned to his contemplation of the beautiful face of the girl lying so white and still on the wooden settee, as revealed to him by the light of the swinging oil lamp directly over her head.

The longer Victor Lamont gazed, the more infatuated he became with that pure, sweet face.

"You shall love me," he muttered; "I swear it! Victor Lamont has never yet wished for anything that he did not obtain, sooner or later, by fair means or foul; and I wish for your love, fair girl—wish, long, crave for it with all my heart, with all my soul, with all the depth and strength of my nature! I will win you, and we will go far away from the scenes that know me but too well, where a reward is offered for my capture, and where prison doors yawn to receive me. I will marry you, and then I will reform—I will do anything you ask of me; but I must, I *will* have your love, or I—will—kill—you! I could never bear to see you the bride of another."

CHAPTER LV.

"Yes, you shall marry me, though Heaven and earth combine to take you from me!" muttered Victor Lamont, gazing down upon the pure, marble-white face of Bernardine. "It is said that some day, sooner or later, every man meets his fate, and when he does meet that one of all others, his whole life changes. The past, with all those whom he has met and fancied before, is as nothing to him now, and his dreams are only of the future and that elysium where he is to wander hand in hand with the one he loves.

"Hand in hand—will I ever *dare* clasp in mine that little white hand that I know must be as pure and spotless as a lily leaf? Would not my own hand, dark and hardened in sin, ay, bathed in blood even, wither away at the contact?

"If I had lived a good, honorable, upright life, I might have won the love and the respect of this young girl. If she knew me as I am, as the police know me, she would recoil from me in horror; but *she must never know*—never! I do not think she saw my face—ay, I could swear that she did not. I will tell her that I was a traveler happening to pass and saw her at the mercy of a ruffian, and rescued her.

"I will have her thanks, her heartfelt gratitude. I will tell her that I will see her safely back to her friends, as soon as my horse—which became lame in the encounter—is able to make the journey, which will not be later than a day or two at the furthest. In the meantime, I will comfort her, pity her, sympathize with her.

"I have always been successful in winning the hearts of women without scarcely any effort on my part whatever, and I vow that I will win this girl's.

"The *La Gascoigne* sails in three days from now. I will sail away in her, and this beautiful treasure shall sail with me as my bride, my beauteous bride.

"I will turn everything into cash. I will see young Mrs. Gardiner, and at the point of a revolver, if need be, cause her to beg, borrow, or steal a few thousand more for me from that handsome, aristocratic husband of hers.

"Then I will desert this gang that hang like barnacles about me, that know too

much about me, and would squeal on me any moment to save themselves if they got into a tight place. I will go so far away that they will never get money enough together to attempt to follow me."

The clock on the mantel of an inner room warned him that time was flying swift-winged past him.

He stooped to kiss the beautiful, marble-like lips, that could not utter a demur, locked as they were in unconsciousness; then he drew back.

Even in her utter helplessness there was something like an armor about her—even as the innocent bud is encompassed and protected by the sharpest thorns from the hand that would ruthlessly gather it.

"The kiss from those pure lips must be freely offered, not stolen," he muttered; and turning on his heel, he hurried quickly from the apartment while that worthy resolution was strong upon him and his good impulses in the ascendency.

Mrs. Dick was suspiciously near the door; in his own mind he felt sure that she had been spying upon him through the key-hole.

"Your horse is ready, Victor Lamont," she said.

"It took you a long time to go upon your errand," he replied, tauntingly. "No doubt you harnessed the horse yourself, to spare that lazy husband of yours the trouble of doing it," he added.

The woman muttered something between her teeth which he did not quite catch; nor did he take the trouble to listen.

Vaulting quickly into the saddle, his mettlesome horse was off quite as soon as he could grasp the reins, and in an instant he was lost to sight in the dense gloom which precedes the dawn.

It was quite light when Victor Lamont reached the spot by the brook-side—the spot where he had met the lovely young stranger but a short time before.

What a strange fate it was that caused him to discover a flask of brandy in the pocket of the saddle!

That was his failing—drink! He had always guarded against taking even a single draught when he had an important duty to perform; but on this occasion he told himself he must make an exception.

"I will drink to the health of my beautiful bride to be," he muttered, raising the flask to his lips; and he drank long and deep, the brandy leaping like fire through his veins.

He had not long to wait in his place of concealment ere he heard the sound of footsteps.

Looking through the heavy branches, he saw the figure of a woman—a familiar figure, it seemed to him—moving rapidly to and fro among the blooms.

He called to her, believing this time he was face to face with young Mrs. Gardiner, when he found to his keen disappointment it was only Antoinette, the clever French maid.

She should take a message to her mistress, he determined; and tearing a leaf from his memorandum-book, he hastily penciled a note to Sally Gardiner, which he felt sure would bring her with all possible haste to the place at which he awaited her.

"Give this to your mistress with dispatch, Antoinette," he said.

He knew the golden key that would be apt to unlock this French maid's interest to do his bidding. As he spoke, he took from his pocket-book a crisp bank-note, which he told the girl she was to spend for bon-bons or ribbons for herself.

He had always made it a point to fee the French maid well, that he might have a powerful ally in the home of his intended victim.

The money, together with a little judicious flattery now and then, had won Antoinette completely over.

As Victor Lamont sat on the mossy bowlder by the brook-side, watching and waiting, he observed, early as the hour was, that the servants of the mansion had begun to bestir themselves. One hour passed after Antoinette had returned to the house; then another.

Young Mrs. Gardiner did not come to the rendezvous.

"Why is she not here?" he asked himself; and for the first time in his life he quite lost control of himself in a fit of terrible anger, and to calm himself he had recourse more than once to the silver flask which he carried in his breast-pocket.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed; then slowly one, two, three, four—another

five; then replacing his watch in his pocket, and quivering with rage, Victor Lamont started for the house.

CHAPTER LVI.

The sound of the galloping hoofs of Victor Lamont's steed had scarcely died away in the distance ere Bernardine opened her eyes and looked wonderingly about her. For an instant she believed that her strange surroundings—the bare room, with its curtainless windows, and the strange women bending over her—were but the vagaries of a too realistic dream from which she was awakening. But even while this impression was strong upon her, the woman said, sneeringly:

"So you have regained consciousness—that's bad;" and she looked crossly at the girl.

"Where am I—and who are you?" asked Bernardine, amazedly, sitting bolt upright on the wooden settee, and staring in wonder up at the hard face looking down into her own. But before she could answer, a wave of memory swept over Bernardine, and she cried out in terror: "Oh, I remember standing by the brook, and the dark-faced man that appeared—how he caught hold of my arms in a grasp of steel, and I fainted. Did he bring me away from Gardiner Castle?" she demanded, indignantly—"*dared* he do such a thing?"

"Do not get excited," replied the woman, coolly. "Always take everything cool—that's the best way."

"But why did he bring me here?" insisted Bernardine.

"You will have to ask him when he comes back. He is the only one who can answer that," returned the woman.

Bernardine sprung quickly to her feet; but it was not until she attempted to take a step forward that she realized how weak she was.

"What are you intending to do?" asked the woman, sneeringly.

"Leave this place," replied Bernardine, sharply. "I have no idea as to why I was brought here; but I do not intend to stop for explanations. Step out of my way, please, and allow me to pass."

The woman laughed, and that laugh was not pleasant to hear.

"That is contrary to my orders. You are to remain here, in my charge, under my eye, until—well, until the person who brought you here says you may go."

Bernardine's dark eyes flashed; she looked amazed.

"Do you mean to infer that I am to be detained here—against my will?" demanded the girl.

"That is as you choose to look at it, miss. I am to coax you to keep me company here, and, if you refuse, to insist upon your doing so; and finally, if it becomes necessary, to *make* you accede to my wishes, or, rather, the wishes of the one who brought you here."

Bernardine drew herself up to her full height, and looked at the woman with unflinching eyes, saying, slowly:

"You have lent yourself to a most cruel scheme to entrap an innocent girl; but know this: I would die by my own hand sooner than marry the villain who had me conveyed in this most despicable way to this isolated place. I have no doubt you know the whole story; but I say this: When my poor father died, I was freed forever from the power of my mortal foe. His sword fell from over my head, where he had held it suspended. He can not pursue my hapless father beyond the gates of death."

"What you are talking about is an enigma to me," returned the woman, grimly.

"If he has not told you the truth about this matter, listen to me, and let me tell it," cried Bernardine, trembling with excitement. "I—I have known this man who had me brought here for long years, and I know him only to fear and distrust him—more than words can express.

"One day, quite by accident, he met me on the street—right before my own door—and he stopped short, looking at me with evident admiration expressed in his coarse face and glittering black eyes."

"'Ah, ha! you turn up your little nose at me, eh?' he cried. 'Well, you shall be sorry for that, and in a fortnight, too, I'll warrant.'

"I would have passed him by without deigning him a reply; but he caught me by the shoulder, and held me fast.

"'No, you don't move on like that!' he yelled in my ear, a great flush rising to his already florid, wine-stained features. 'You shall kiss me, my pretty, here and now!'

"I endeavored to pass him, but he still clutched me tightly, fiercely in his strong grasp, and I—I dealt him a stinging blow across the face with the palm of my hand.

"The action surprised him so that he released me from his grasp for a single instant, and in that instant I darted away from him like a startled hare.

"'You shall pay for this!' he cried, looking after me. 'He laughs best who laughs last!'

"It was within a fortnight after that most unfortunate event that the crisis came. My father sent for me, and told me he had had a proposal for my hand.

"'The man who wants to marry you will make a great lady of you, my girl,' said my father, eagerly. 'You are lucky! I repeat you are *very* lucky! Why are you looking at me with troubled eyes,' he demanded, 'when you ought to be clapping your hands in delight and asking me who it is?'

"'I am silent because I fear to inquire the name,' I replied, slowly, 'lest you should utter a name which I loathe.'

"'The man is rich,' he said, leaning forward eagerly.

"'Riches do not bring happiness,' I replied. 'I know of a man whom the world calls rich, and yet I would not marry him if he had all the wealth of the world to pour at my feet. But who is this man who has come to you without even the formality of finding out if it was worth his while—without deigning to take the trouble to find out if I could care for him to the extent of becoming his wife?'

"'The son of our landlord,' replied my father, his voice a little husky.

"'Were I not so angry I should be amused,' I answered. 'If there was not another man on the face of the earth, I would not marry Jasper Wilde. I——'"

The woman had been listening to Bernardine's story indifferently enough until she uttered that name. At the sound of it, she caught her breath sharply, and sprung suddenly forward.

"What name did you say? What is the name of the man who wanted to marry

you?" she gasped. "Did I understand you to say Jasper Wilde?"

"Yes," replied Bernardine, wonderingly; and her wonder grew into the utmost consternation when the woman fell at her feet shrieking with rage.

CHAPTER LVII.

Bernardine was tender of heart. She saw that the woman who was groveling at her feet was suffering mental pain, and she realized that in some vague way the name Jasper Wilde, which she had just uttered, had occasioned it.

She forgot her surroundings, forgot the woman had declared it her intention to detain her there even against her will; she remembered only that a human being was suffering, and she must aid her if she could.

Suddenly the woman struggled to her feet.

"I did not know who you were talking about until you mentioned *that name*!" she cried, excitedly and almost incoherently; "for it was *not* Jasper Wilde who brought you here. It never occurred to me that Jasper Wilde had a hand in it—that he had anything to do with it. I am Jasper Wilde's wife, girl, and the story you have told is a revelation to me. He must have got the other man to bring you here, and he means to fly with you and desert me! Ha, ha, ha! I always find out everything he attempts to do in *some* way!"

"He went off on his horse just as you were brought in. Before he comes, I will set you free."

"Oh, I thank you more than words can express!" said Bernardine, fervently.

"You can take the horse and buggy that they always have hitched and ready for an emergency. If they took you from Gardiner mansion, you will find it a good hour's drive; but if you start at once you will get there by sunrise. You may meet some of them on the road; but you seem to be a brave girl. You have a horse that not one of them could overtake in a five-mile race, if you lay on the whip. Now go!"

"But you?" cried Bernardine. "I can not go and leave you suffering here. You are very ill—I see it in your face. You are white as death. Let me take you to the nearest doctor—there are several hereabouts——"

But the woman shook her head sadly.

"I feel that it is of no use," she whispered, hoarsely. "I feel that I am doomed—that my hour has come. Your startling news has done it," she gasped. "Jasper once dealt me a terrible blow over the heart. I—I did not die then, but my heart has been weak ever since. Go—go, girl, while the opportunity is yours. You can not escape him, if he returns and finds you here! Leave me to my fate. It is better so."

As she uttered the last word, she fell back with a dull thud, and Bernardine saw—ah, she knew—that the patient heart of this poor creature who had loved faithless, cruel Jasper Wilde to the bitter end had slowly broken at last.

Reverently covering the white, staring face with her apron, and breathing a sobbing prayer for her, Bernardine fled from the room.

A faint belt of light over the eastern hills told her that dawn was not far off.

She found the horse and buggy where the woman had indicated, and with hands trembling with nervous excitement untied the bridle.

The animal scarcely gave her time to climb into the vehicle, ere he was off with the speed of the wind through the stubble fields of the old deserted farm and on to the high-road.

It was all that Bernardine could do to cling to the reins, let alone attempt to guide the animal, whose speed was increasing perceptibly at every step he took.

The trees, the wild flowers by the road-side, the dark pines and mile-posts, seemed to whirl past her, and she realized, with a terrible quaking of the heart, that the horse was getting beyond her control and was running away.

The light buggy seemed to fairly spin over the road without touching it. From a run, the horse had broken into a mad gallop, which the small white hands clinging to the reins was powerless to stop.

Suddenly from a bend in the road, as she reached it, she saw a horseman riding leisurely toward her on a chestnut mare which she recognized at once as belonging to the Gardiner stables. He could not be one of the grooms, nor could he be one of the guests astir at that hour; still, there was something familiar in the form of the man advancing toward her at an easy canter.

He seemed to take in the situation at a glance, and quickly drew back into the bushes to give the runaway horse full swing in the narrow road.

But as Bernardine advanced at that mad, flying pace, she heard the man shout:

"My horse, by all that is wonderful! But that isn't Mag in the buggy. Who in thunder can it be in that wagon, anyhow?"

That loud, harsh voice! No wonder Bernardine's heart almost ceased beating as she heard it. It was the voice of Jasper Wilde.

Only Heaven's mercy kept her from swooning outright, for she knew Jasper Wilde would recognize her as soon as he came abreast of her.

This proved to be the case.

"Bernardine Moore!" he shouted, hardly believing he had seen aright.

For one moment of time he was taken so completely by surprise that he was quite incapable of action, and in that moment Bernardine's horse was many rods past him.

"Yes, it is Bernardine Moore!" he cried out, excitedly.

He did not ask himself how she happened to be there; he had no time for that.

Cursing himself for the time he had lost through his astonishment at the discovery, he wheeled his horse about with so sharp a jerk that it almost brought the animal upon its haunches; then started in mad pursuit of the girl, shouting at the top of his voice to Bernardine to saw hard on both lines, and jerk quickly backward.

To his intense rage, he saw Bernardine take out the whip and lay it on the back of the runaway horse, and it flashed across his mind what that meant.

She had seen and recognized him as she flew past him. She knew he was hurrying after her, and she preferred death rather than that he should overtake her.

Curses loud and deep broke from his lips. He yelled to her to draw rein; but she only urged the horse on the faster.

He had searched the world over to find Bernardine Moore, and now that he had come across her by chance, she should not escape him like this.

A mere chit of a girl should not outwit him in that fashion.

A mad thought occurred to him.

There was but one way of stopping that horse and overtaking Bernardine, and that was to draw his revolver and shoot the animal dead in its tracks.

He liked the horse; but nothing on earth should prevent him from capturing the girl he still loved to desperation.

To think, with him, was to act; and quick as a flash, he drew a weapon from his hip-pocket, and the loud report of a shot instantly followed.

CHAPTER LVIII.

The shot which rang out so clearly on the early morning air missed its mark, and the noise only succeeded in sending Bernardine's horse along the faster. Taking one terrified glance backward, Bernardine saw Jasper Wilde's horse suddenly swerve, unseating her rider, and the next instant he was measuring his length in the dusty road-side.

The girl did not pause to look again, nor did she draw rein upon the panting steed, until, covered with foam, and panting for breath, he drew up of his own accord at the gate of Gardiner mansion.

One of the grooms came running forward, and Bernardine saw that he was greatly excited.

"The maids missed you, and feared something had happened to you, Miss Moore," he said; "but we were all so alarmed about young master, it caused us to forget everything else, we all love Master Jay so well."

A sharp pain, like that caused by a dagger's thrust, seemed to flash through Bernardine's heart as those words fell upon her startled ear.

"What has happened to your master, John?" she asked, huskily; and her voice sounded terribly unnatural.

In a voice husky with emotion the groom explained to her what was occurring—how young Mrs. Gardiner stood guard over her husband, refusing to allow the doctor to perform an operation which might save their young master, who was dying by inches with each passing moment of time—how she had caught up a thin, sharp-bladed knife which the doctor had just taken from his surgical case, and, brandishing it before her with the fury of a fiend incarnate, defied any one to dare approach.

Both Mrs. Gardiner and Miss Margaret had gone into hysterics, and had to be removed from the apartment to an adjoining room.

"Oh, Miss Moore, surely your services were never so much needed as now, you

seem so clever! Oh, if you could, by any means in earthly power, coax young Mrs. Gardiner from her husband's bedside, the operation would be performed, whether she consented or not! In God's name, see what you can do!"

Bernardine waited to hear no more, but, like a storm-driven swallow, fairly flew across the lawn to the house, without even stopping a moment to give the least explanation concerning the strange horse and buggy which she had left in the groom's hands.

As the man had said, the greatest excitement pervaded the mansion. Servants were running about hither and thither, wringing their hands, expecting to hear each moment—they knew not what.

Like one fairly dazed, Bernardine flew along the corridor toward the blue and gold room which she knew had been set apart for Jay Gardiner's use.

She could hear the murmur of excited voices as she reached the door.

She saw that it was ajar. A draught of wind blew it open as she approached.

As she reached the threshold, Bernardine stood rooted to the spot at the spectacle that met her gaze.

Young Mrs. Gardiner was bending over her hapless husband with a face so transformed by hate—yes, hate—there was no mistaking the expression—that it nearly took Bernardine's breath away. In her right hand she held the gleaming blade, the end of which rested against Jay's bared breast.

The doctor had sunk into the nearest seat, and in that unfortunate moment had taken his eyes off the sufferer, whose life was ebbing so swiftly, and had dropped his face in his trembling hands to think out what he had best do in this dire moment of horror.

All this Bernardine took in at a single glance.

Jay Gardiner's life hung in the balance. She forgot her surroundings, forgot everything, but that she must save him even though at the risk of her own life. She would have gladly given a hundred lives, if she had them, to save him.

She did not stop an instant to formulate any plan, but with a cry of the most intense horror, born of acute agony, she had cleared the space which divided her from young Mrs. Gardiner at a single bound, and in a twinkling had hurled the

blade from her hands.

Sally Gardiner was taken so entirely by surprise for an instant that she did not stoop to recover the gleaming knife which had fallen between her assailant and herself.

In that instant, the doctor, who had witnessed the scene which had taken place with such lightning-like rapidity, sprung forward and grasped the furious woman, pinioning her hands behind her, and called loudly upon the servants to come to his aid and remove her from Jay Gardiner's bedside.

But there was little need of their assistance. Sally Gardiner stood regarding Bernardine, her hands hanging by her sides, her eyes staring eagerly at the intruder.

"*You* here!" she muttered, in an almost inaudible voice. "What are *you* doing in his sick-room, *you* whom he always loved instead of me? He married *me* from a sense of honor, but he loved you, and never ceased to let me understand that to be the case. What are you doing here now—*you* of all other women?"

"Come with me quietly into the other room and I will tell you how it happens that I am here—in *his* home," whispered Bernardine, huskily.

"No," she shrieked, laughing a hard, jeering, terrible laugh in Bernardine's white, pain-drawn face as she battled fiercely to shake off the doctor's hold of her pinioned arms. "I shall not go—I shall not leave my post until he is *dead*! Do you hear?—until he is dead! I shall not save him for you! I'd rather be his widow than his unloved wife!"

"Come!" whispered Bernardine, sternly. "A human life is at stake—he is dying. You *must* come with me and let the doctor be free to do his work. I command you to come!" she added, in a stern, ringing, sonorous voice that seemed to thrill the other to her very heart's core and fascinate her—ay, fairly paralyze her will-power. "Come!" repeated Bernardine, laying a hand on her shoulder—"come out into the grounds with me, Mrs. Gardiner—out into the fresh air. I have something to tell you. I had an encounter with Victor Lamont last night," she added in a whisper, her eyes fixed steadily on the young wife as she slowly uttered the words.

Their effect was magical on Sally Gardiner. She reeled forward like one about to faint.

"Let me go out into the grounds alone," she cried, hoarsely. "I must collect my scattered thoughts. Come to me there in half an hour, and tell me. I—I can listen to you then."

And with these words, the fiery creature left the room, staggering rather than walking through the open French window.

The doctor caught Bernardine's hand in his.

"If he lives, it will be to your strategy that he owes his life," he said, hurriedly. "Now leave the room quickly. In ten minutes I will call you, and you shall tell his mother and sister whether it be life or death."

True to his promise, within the prescribed time the doctor called Bernardine.

"It will be life," he said, joyously; "and in performing the operation, I also found a small piece of bone resting against the brain, which was the cause of the strange lapse of memory he complained to me about several months ago. His brain is perfectly clear now. I heard from his lips a startling story," continued the doctor, taking Bernardine aside. "Come to him."

She refused, saying she was just about to leave the house; but the doctor insisted, and at length, accompanied by Jay's mother and his sister, she went to his bedside.

Jay's joy at beholding Bernardine was so great they almost feared for his life. And then the truth came out: his marriage to Bernardine was legal and binding before God and man, and that, directly after he had left her on the day of the ceremony, he had met with an accident which completely obliterated the event from his mind; even all remembrance of Bernardine's existence.

"What, then, is poor Sally?" cried his mother, in horror. "She wedded you, knowing nothing of all this!"

Before he could answer, they heard a great commotion in the corridor below; and, forgetful of the sick man, Antoinette rushed in weeping wildly, crying out that her young mistress had just been found dead in the brook.

She died without knowing the truth, and they were all thankful for that—not even her family or Miss Rogers ever knew the sad truth.

Two men fled from the vicinity that day—Victor Lamont and Jasper Wilde.

When Jay Gardiner was able to travel, he and his mother and sister and Bernardine went abroad; but, out of respect to poor Sally's memory, it was a year before they took their places in the great world as—what they had been from the first—husband and wife.

In the sunshine of the happy years that followed, Bernardine never reproached her husband for that blotted page in their history which he would have given so much to efface.

Sally's father and mother and sister grieved many a long year over her death.

Antoinette stole quietly away, and was seen no more. Old Mrs. Gardiner and Miss Margaret are as happy as the day is long in the love of Jay's sweet, grave young wife, while her husband fairly adores her, though two others share his love as the sunny days flit by—a sturdy youngster whom they call Jay, and a dainty little maiden named Sally—named after Miss Rogers, and whom that lady declares is to be her heiress—a jolly little maiden, hoidenish and mischievous, strangely like that other one who came so near wrecking her father's and mother's life.

The little girl has but one fear—she never goes near the brook; perhaps its babbling waters could reveal a strange story—who can tell?

Over a grave on the sloping hill-side there is a marble shaft. The name engraved upon it is Sally Gardiner, that the world may not know the story of her who rests there.

The sun does not fall upon it, the shadow of the trees is so dense; but soft and pityingly falls the dew on the hearts of the flowers that cover the grave where Sally sleeps.

THE END.

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Transcriber's note:

The original edition from which this electronic book was scanned contained the table of contents for a different novel. This erroneous page has been deleted and a new table of contents created.

In addition, the following typographic errors in the original edition have been corrected.

In Chapter I, "and. what was better still" was changed to "and, what was better still", and "had establish himself" was changed to "had established himself".

In Chapter II, "If she has a preference for either" was changed to "If he has a preference for either".

In Chapter III, "boated and spurred" was changed to "booted and spurred".

In Chapter IX, a quotation mark at the beginning of the paragraph opening "As he conversed" was deleted.

In Chapter XII, "a notion to your" was changed to "a notion to you".

In Chapter XVI, "It was not Mrs. Pendlteon" was changed to "It was not Mrs. Pendleton".

In Chapter XVIII, "her stern lips set" was changed to "his stern lips set".

In Chapter XXII, "a hundreds times welcome" was changed to "a hundred times welcome".

In Chapter XXVIII, "In an instant Doctor Gardner" was changed to "In an instant Doctor Gardiner".

In Chapter XXIX, "hundred of miles away" was changed to "hundreds of miles away", and "You clothes are covered with dust" was changed to "Your clothes are covered with dust".

In Chapter XXXVIII, "It an instant all the terrible scenes" was changed to "In an

instant all the terrible scenes".

In Chapter XL, "a sever headache" was changed to "a severe headache".

In Chapter XLVII, "of much vaule" was changed to "of much value".

In Chapter LVI, "who had be conveyed" was changed to "who had me conveyed".

In the list of books advertised on the back cover, "A Passionate Love, Barabara Howard" has been changed to "A Passionate Love, Barbara Howard", and "Miss Estcourt, Charles Gorvice" has been changed to "Miss Estcourt, Charles Garvice".

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