ALL FOR LOVE

BY MRS. ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER

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OR,

Her Heart's Sacrifice

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Table of Contents

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CHAPTER I.

A FAMILIAR SONG.

From a cottage window, embowered in azure morning glories, a girl's sweet voice sang blithely:

> "My heart with joy would thrill if you loved me,
> 'Twould give this life of mine its fill of ecstasy;
> Each golden moment spent with you on wings of Joy would flee;
> The sky would be a ceaseless blue if you loved me!"

Berry Vining, the little village beauty, singing so blithely at her window of a love that as yet she had never known, was at the crisis of her fate, for at that very moment down the village street swept a gay cavalcade of riders, and as the sweet voice floated out upon the air, their glances turned upward in irrepressible admiration.

> "What odds to me how dark the night if you loved me,
> For in your eyes a beacon light of love I'd see;
> My future, now a dark abyss, forever changed would be,
> To sunny paths of rosy bliss if you loved me!"

She was so lovely, this little Berry Vining, with her wealth of curly chestnut locks, framing a face so fresh and fair as the morning glories round the window—so lovely, with her big, wondering, brown eyes under long, shady lashes, her sea-shell tints, her perfect little nose, and rose-red lips, and dainty chin, where dimples swarmed, entrancingly, whenever she smiled, that no one could look at her without admiration.

When all those eager eyes were leveled at her window the girl drew very hastily backward, but not until she had seen one hat lifted from a handsome head in her honor, as the man's eyes paid eager tribute to her charms.

It all passed in a moment, but not too quickly for that flashing glance to strike fire in a romantic maiden's heart.

The laughing, chattering riders passed on, the handsome men, the pretty women, and Berry hid her blushing face among the green, heart-shaped leaves of the morning glories, and whispered to the flowers:

“Oh, what a handsome young man! What beautiful eyes, what a loving smile! How grandly he rode on that fine bay horse—like a young prince, I fancy, although I never saw one—and how courteous to bow to me, though he had never seen me before! Even proud Miss Montague, who rode by his side, did not appear to notice me, little Berry Vining, that she has known all her life! Oh, how I envy her the joy of being with him, of hearing him speak, and looking into his beaming eyes! I would give the whole world for such a splendid lover!”

“Berry! Berry!” called an impatient voice from the foot of the stairs, but unheeding the summons, her thoughts ran on in melodious whispers to the soft, green leaves:

“Oh, I love him already, I cannot help it, for when his eyes met mine a great rapturous shudder thrilled me through my whole being and told me I had met my fate! Oh, shall we ever meet again, I wonder! We must, we must, or my heart will break with love and longing! It was prophetic, that song I was singing as his eyes met mine!” and she began to hum again tenderly:

“What odds to me how dark the night if you loved me,
For in your eyes a beacon light of love I’d see!”

“Berry!—Ber-en-i-ce Vi-ning!” called the impatient voice downstairs again, and starting from her rosy dreams of love, the girl flew to reply:

“Well, mamma?”

The pale, faded little mother answered complainingly:

“Always too late! I called you to look at the riding party from Montague’s—their summer guests—five grand couples of them, on horseback! But you missed everything coming down so slow!”

“Oh, no, dear mamma, for I was watching them from my window, and saw all. How fine they looked, indeed! I wish I could be like them!”

“If wishes were horses beggars would ride!” mocked the pale, tired mother sourly. “Come, now, and tidy up the kitchen, for I must be off to my day’s work. There’s no rest for the weary.”

She snatched down a rusty black bonnet from the nail where it hung, and hurried from the house, hastening downtown to the shop, where she worked by the day for the pittance that supported herself and daughter. She was a tailoress by trade, and had been reared, wedded, and widowed in this little New Jersey town. Her eldest children had all married, and gone to humble homes of their own; she lived alone in the tiny cottage with her youngest girl, Berenice, or Berry, as she was familiarly called. A boy, still younger, lived on a farm with a relative.

Berry, now almost nineteen, had many admirers, but none of them had ever touched her romantic young heart, much to the regret of her work-worn mother, who longed to see her pretty darling settled down to married life in a comfortable home, with a good husband.

But Berry had only laughed at her suitors, for in her girlish thoughtlessness she did not realize her mother’s cares and anxieties. Unconsciously to herself, perhaps, she had secret ambitions, born, it may be, of her high sounding name Berenice, or the knowledge that she had the gift of beauty, so potent in its spell upon mankind.

Berry longed for higher things, and despised the humdrum lives of her sisters with the humble mates they had chosen. Like another Maud Muller, she longed for something better than she had known.

So as she tucked the blue gingham apron over her spotless print gown, and deftly tidied up the kitchen, her excited thoughts followed the gay cavalcade of riders with eager interest and longing.

“I believe I am as pretty as any of those proud, rich girls,” she murmured, glancing into the little cracked mirror over the mantel, and sighing: “Why should I have so different a fate? Why did my poor father have to drive an humble delivery wagon all his life and die of a malarial fever at last; and why does poor mamma have to work as a tailoress, while Rosalind Montague has a millionaire for a father, and a fine lady mother flaunting in silks and diamonds? In only one thing has God made us equal, and that is beauty. I have rivaled her to-day with her

splendid lover, and who knows but it may end in raising me to her height of wealth and pride! If he loves and marries me, how much I can do for poor mamma and the others! They should never have to work so hard again. Oh, I am so happy, hoping he loves me, for even if he were poor and humble as I am, I could love him just as well."

"Rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat!" went the knocker on the door, and her heart leaped wildly as she flew to open it.

There stood the red-headed lad from the florist's with a large bunch of splendid red roses, wet with morning dew, and exhaling the rarest spicy fragrance.

"American beauties, Berry Vining—for you!" he cried, thrusting them into her eager little hands, with a significant grin on his good-natured, freckled face.

CHAPTER II.

THE ROSY EMBLEM.

Berry cried out in delight as she pressed the flowers to her face:

“Oh, how sweet, how lovely! Who sent me the roses, Jimmy Dolan?”

“Gent from up ter de hall, sure, but I dunno his name. He was goin’ past our shop on horseback with Miss Montague, and when they turned the corner he rid back and bought these roses and guv me a dollar ter bring ’em ter you, Berry—leastwise he said, ‘that pretty girl in the morning-glory cottage down the street,’ so I knowed ’twas you, and then he said: ‘Tell her the roses came from an ardent admirer.’”

With that Jimmy darted away, and left Berry standing with the roses pressed to her face, lost in a dream of delight.

“He loves me, loves me! For love is the emblem of the sweet, red rose,” thought the romantic little maiden, trembling with pure joy.

To her young mind the gift of the roses was like an avowal of love from the handsome stranger, and she went happily about her simple tasks, hoping, praying that before another day they might meet again.

When Mrs. Vining came home that night to the simple tea Berry had prepared, she wondered a little that the girl wore the pretty, ruffled, white gown that had been kept sacred to Sunday toilets before.

“Must be invited to a party—never saw your Sunday gown on before, in the middle of the week,” she observed tentatively.

Berry, blushing almost as red as the rose on her breast, answered carelessly:

“Oh, I just thought of standing at the gate to see the people going up to the lawn fête at the hall to-night, you know.”

“And wishing in your heart you could go, too, silly child; ain’t you, now?

Well, you're pretty enough to be there, if that was all, Berry, but it isn't, more's the pity for you, so don't waste any regret on it, dearie, for remember the true saying: 'Poor folks have to have poor ways.'"

"I don't think it should be the way, mamma, for I've often heard it said that clothes don't make the man—nor woman, either! For instance, now, Miss Rosalind Montague is no better, nor prettier, than I am, if she were stripped of her fine clothes and jewels!"

"Fie, fie! you vain little chick, I'm surprised at your talk. Let me hear no more of it. You must be contented in the sphere where Heaven has placed you, Berry. Or, if you wish to better your lot, you have a fine chance before you now."

"What do you mean?" gasped Berry breathlessly.

"You have another proposal of marriage—one from a rich man!"

"Oh, mamma!" gasped Berry joyously, her eyes beaming, her cheeks aflame.

She could think of one—only one lover—at this moment.

How quickly he had found out her mother, how impetuous he was, her handsome lover—how impetuous, how adorable!

The future stretched before her eyes in a haze of bliss—the realization of all the golden gleams she had been weaving to-day on the airy foundation of a bow and smile, and the gift of a bunch of red roses!

Silly, happy little Berry! How quickly her dream was to be shattered!

Mrs. Vining, draining her teacup, and setting it back in its saucer, now continued blandly:

"To-day my employer—Widower Wilson, you know—was talking to me about this very lawn fête that the Montagues are giving up at the hall to-night, and he said it was to announce Miss Rosalind's betrothal to Senator Bonair's handsome son, the one that rode with her this morning, Berry. And he went on to say—what do you think, my dear?" triumphantly.

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” Berry answered, with a sudden paling cheek, while she said to herself, in dismay:

“Oh, no, no, no, he is not engaged to her—he cannot be! He loves me—me only!—and he will surely come and tell me so!”

“He said, my dear, that he was hoping to have a lawn fête, too, very soon, to announce his engagement to the sweetest and prettiest girl in New Market, if she would have him, and he wanted her mother to ask her to-night if she would. Now can you guess?” smiling broadly.

“N-no, mamma!” faltered Berry.

“Why, then, you are very stupid, indeed, to-night, and I never found you so before! Well, then, it’s you, child, you, poor little Berry Vining, he wants to marry, when he might aspire almost to the highest. What a match for you, dearie! Aren’t you proud and glad?”

Berry, stamping her little foot, cried out petulantly:

“Mamma, you must surely be going crazy! The idea of marrying old Wilson, indeed! Older than my own father, for he began as errand boy in Wilson’s shop, and then old Wilson must have been white-headed!”

“He was not, you pert minx, he was only a young married man, not more than ten years over your father’s age! But what does that matter, when he’s a widower now, worth a hundred thousand dollars, and willing to stoop to marry a poor girl whose father drove his delivery wagon, and whose mother works by the day in the shop to take care of you!”

“I wouldn’t marry the old blear-eyed miser if every hair of his head were gold and strung with diamonds, but you may take him yourself, mamma, if you want him so badly in the family!” cried Berry, with mocking laughter.

“I only wish he would give me the chance, since you are such a fool!” angrily replied the disappointed mother, who craved the ease and comfort for her old age that Mr. Wilson’s money would give to herself and pretty, thoughtless Berenice.

She flung herself down on the kitchen lounge for her usual evening nap after tea, and her daughter, still laughing at the ridiculous suit of her aged wooer, hastened outdoors to the front gate to watch every passer-by with a throbbing heart, in the eager hope of his coming—his, her lover, for she would call him that in spite of a hundred Rosalinds! It was false what they said of his betrothal to the proud, rich beauty, with her flax-gold hair and bluebell eyes. She could never believe it, never, after all that had passed to-day—the bow, the flashing glance of love, the gift of the roses. Presently he would be coming to tell her that he loved her, and her alone.

It was one of those moonlight nights in early September, that seem like June. The full moon shone in a cloudless sky, sown thick with stars; the air was warm and fragrant, and seemed to pulsate with love. Every girl remembers how on such a night she has hung over the front gate, gowned in white, with a rose in her hair, waiting and watching for a lover dearer to her heart than all the world beside!

Berenice did not watch long in vain, for it was a true presentiment that told her the idol of her heart was coming.

Men and women passed and repassed for almost an hour, but at last her heart leaped with subtle ecstasy, for one paused and stood in front of her, gazing down with a smile into her starry eyes.

“Ah, Miss Vining, good evening!” cried a musical voice. “You see, I have found out your name. Mine is Charley Bonair. Do you remember me?”

CHAPTER III.

SWEETHEARTS.

Remember him? ah!

Berry could have laughed aloud at the tender question.

She knew that she could never forget his glance and smile of this morning her whole life long.

Yet, with her pretty head poised, coquettishly, on one side, and her eyes half veiled under their shady lashes, she faltered demurely:

“I—I—believe you are the same gentleman that passed with Miss Montague this morning, and bowed to me.”

“Yes, you are right,” he answered, with a soft laugh, as he leaned his elbows on the gate with his face very close to her, while he continued tenderly:

“And from the first moment I saw your lovely face I could not get you out of my mind. I asked Miss Montague who was that pretty young girl, and she frowned at me, and said: ‘There’s not a pretty face that can escape you, Charley; but that is only little Berry Vining, the daughter of a poor tailoress, not in our set at all, so don’t ask for an introduction.’”

Berry’s cheeks grew hot, and her heart thumped with anger as she said to herself:

“I’ll pay you out for that, my proud lady, by taking him away from you!”

Handsome Charley Bonair continued wheedlingly:

“As I couldn’t get properly introduced to you, I thought I’d present myself. I see you are wearing some of my roses.”

“Thank you so much for them; I love roses dearly,” murmured Berry, in shy bliss, her head in such a whirl under his laughing, ardent glance, that she hardly knew whether she was standing on her head or on her

feet.

In his black evening suit, and a white carnation in his buttonhole, he was superbly handsome, and carried with him that subtle aroma of wealth and position so alluring to a poor girl brought for the first time in contact with uppertendom. It was as if a being from another sphere, a distant star, had fallen at her feet, stooping to lift her to his dazzling height.

Trembling with mingled pride and love and joy, she looked up at him with her heart in her eyes, her tender secret plain as day to him, almost too easy a conquest to the blasé young man of the world.

But he continued to smile very tenderly at her, and venturing to clasp her little hand as it clung to the top of the fence, he said:

“I am due at the Montagues’ lawn fête presently, but will you come with me for a little spin in my run-about first? It is just around the corner, and this is the finest night I ever saw for a moonlight drive.”

“Oh, I shall be delighted—but—but—I must ask mamma first,” declared the happy girl.

“Oh, no, for explanations would delay our drive, since I must soon be back to the hall. We will be home before she knows we are gone. Only a two-mile spin, dear little girl,” pleaded the tempter, pressing her little hand.

She thought:

“Mamma is asleep by now, and it would be a pity to arouse her from her nap. Surely there’s no harm in going, as I shall be back before she misses me! And I shall so like to have this triumph over proud Miss Montague, who tried to belittle me in his dear eyes.”

He saw that she was yielding, and, unlatching the gate, quickly drew her outside, placing her small, trembling hand on his arm, and leading her to the waiting trap.

A moment more, and he was lifting her into the elegant little trap, drawn by a magnificent blooded bay horse, whose silver-mounted

harness glittered in the moonlight. Seating himself by her side, he took up the reins, and away they went through the town and out upon the broad country road, where the air, with the salty tang from the sea, was fresh and sweet and exhilarating.

“Almost seems like eloping, does it not?” laughed Charley Bonair. “What if it were so, dear little girl?”

Berry caught her breath with a startled gasp, a dizzy suspicion running through her mind.

Did he mean it?

Was it an elopement sure enough? Was he taking her away to marry her, now, to-night?

What would Rosalind Montague say?

She never dreamed of resisting if such were his will.

Poor little Berry was under the intoxicating spell of a maiden’s first love, and it did not seem to her as if her splendid hero could do anything wrong.

The bay horse flew over the smooth road, the fresh air blew in their faces, lifting the soft curls from Berry’s white brow, and she felt like one in Elysium. She was dwelling in a new and beautiful world, the golden land of love.

Yet, when her companion gently attempted to slip an arm about her waist, she decisively repulsed him.

“No, no; you must not make so free—we are almost strangers,” she exclaimed, blushing warmly.

“Strangers! Why I love you, little girl! Cannot you love me a little in return?” he pleaded.

Berry was about to answer him yes, taking this for a proposal of marriage, when she suddenly remembered the gossip about his betrothal to Rosalind, and drawing back, she faltered tremulously:

“But—but—they say that you are engaged to marry Miss Montague!”

“Bah! What has that to do with your being my sweetheart, I wonder; she need not know about it,” laughed Charley Bonair, leaning as close to her as she would permit, for she was recoiling in perplexity, murmuring:

“But is it true?”

“Why, yes, little one, I’m to marry her some day, I suppose! Deuced pretty girl, you know, and in ‘my set,’ and all that—very proper, of course. But I mean to have as many sweethearts as I like, before and after the wedding, if you please!”

If he had thrust a knife in her tender heart Berry could not have moaned more piteously, for all at once he seemed to her a monster instead of an adorable Prince Charming. With that heartbreaking little moan, she cried plaintively:

“Oh, take me home, take me home quickly! Please, please, please!”

And though the moon and stars still gleamed on as brightly as before, it seemed to her tortured mind as though the whole sky were veiled in inky darkness, and her dream of love and happiness had faded as before a chilling wintry blast.

He had told her he was indeed to marry Rosalind, but that he should continue to have as many sweethearts as he pleased! He dared even think she would consent to be one of them!

She began to tremble like a wind-blown leaf, and as he only laughed in answer to her pleading, she added wildly:

“You are cruel; you are wicked, to be making love to me when you are to marry another! I will have no more to do with you, so there, there, there!” and tearing the roses from her breast and hair, Berry flung them in his face with the passionate fury of “the woman scorned.”

“You dear little vixen!” he exclaimed, boisterously, without turning back.

CHAPTER IV.

LEGITIMATE GAME.

To the gay young gallant, Berry's anger only made her more charming. She had seemed too easy a prize before, for he had read her heart very quickly by the light of former experiences.

A millionaire senator's only son, and not many years older than Berry, he looked upon this poor young girl who had fallen in love with him so easily as only legitimate game if he could win her heart.

Like a flash, it came to him with her bitter words that she could not be so lightly won, that she was proud and pure as she was fair.

The realization of this fact only made her more interesting. Now he swore to himself he would not relinquish the pursuit. There would be more zest in it thus.

So he only laughed at her entreaties to turn back, only laughed as the roses pelted his face and stung him with their thorns, only urged the bay to a greater speed, until Berry, her brief anger passed, suddenly crouched in her seat, sobbing forlornly, in woe and grief:

"Oh, why did I come? What made me so foolish? Hadn't I always been told that rich young men had little use for poor girls, only to rob them of their happiness! Oh, Heaven, spare me from this wretch, and send me safely back to poor mamma!"

"Oh, come now, little darling, don't be so foolish," coaxed Charley Bonair. "Don't you know I wouldn't harm one hair of that pretty little head! Why, I only brought you out for a pleasant drive, and presently I'll take you home safe to your mamma. Maybe I was rather mistaken in you at first, and thought you would be my little sweetheart for the asking. But I surely know better now, and I own I respect you more for it. Come, come, little girl, let us be friends again! Haven't I been honest with you? Don't I own my engagement to Rosalind, although 'pon honor, I almost like you better. But I couldn't marry you, darling, even if I were free of

Rosalind, for my proud, rich father and sisters would never forgive us the mésalliance; and my father would withdraw my allowance, and we should be poor as church mice; see?"

He had spoken gayly, but earnestly, and Berry, who had ceased her sobbing to listen to him, faltered, softly:

"If I loved any one very much I could be happy with him, even if we had not a cent in the world!"

The bashful avowal half sobered his gayety, and he exclaimed:

"Do you mean that for me, little one? That you could love me penniless, could marry me if the old dad cut me off with a shilling, and be happy with me on bread and cheese and kisses?"

"Yes, I could," declared Berry ardently, forgetting in the passion of pure, first love all her ambitious dreams for the future. In a moment his arm slipped around her waist, and he drew her to him, crying recklessly:

"I'll take you at your words, sweetheart; I'll marry you to-morrow."

"How dare you kiss me?" Berry cried, fighting him off with her weak, white hands. "Take your arm from my waist! You cannot deceive me with false vows. You are going to marry Rosalind Montague, who has your promise."

"Bad promises are better broken than kept. I'll marry you, my little darling, and tell Rosalind to find another husband!" Bonair answered, with another reckless laugh, still speeding his horse onward, though they were miles and miles away from home by this time, out in the open country, where houses were few and far between.

"I will not listen to your false promises. Oh, take me home, if you have the least regard for me! I did wrong to come, I know, but take me back before mamma misses me!" entreated Berry, clutching his arm with hysterical energy, tears raining down her pallid cheeks.

All at once she had lost faith in him, and his kisses had frightened her with their fervor, as she realized by the light of the words he had spoken the vast distance between their positions: he, the millionaire

senator's son; she, the daughter of the poor tailoress. No, no, he could never stoop to her, she could never drag him down—he was for Rosalind, his equal. As for her, life was over—she loved him so she could never love another, but she must die of her despair.

But Charley Bonair kept on laughing at her wild entreaties.

"Not yet—not yet!" he cried hilariously, while he urged the bay on, and still onward under the silvery moonlight. "Listen, Berry, I have a clever plan to humiliate Rosalind and cause her to break the engagement so that I may marry you: I shall take you back to the lawn fête, and dance with you there as my guest, with Rosalind and my haughty sisters. Oh, how angry they will be! If they order you to leave I shall defy them, and we will dance on and on, and Rosalind will be furious, vowing she will never speak to me again. How do you like my plan? Will you come with me back to the hall now?"

"Oh, never, never!" cried Berry, shrinking in horror from his sensational proposition, frightened, eager to escape.

"You shall!" laughed Bonair abruptly, turning his horse's head to return.

"I will not!" she shrieked indignantly, and rose to her feet, reckless with despair. The next moment, to his horror, she sprang over the wheel, out into the rocky road, before he could lift a hand to prevent her.

CHAPTER V.

THE TURNING POINT.

As long as he lived, Charley Bonair would never forget that tragic moment.

All at once, the fumes of wine passed from his brain, and left him sober and horrified, the heart sinking like lead in his breast.

It flashed over his mind that Berry's wild leap for liberty, made just as he turned the vehicle around, could hardly fail to result in her instant death on the rough and rocky road.

A loud groan escaped his blanched lips, and he drew the frightened horse swiftly back upon its haunches that he might spring out to go to her assistance.

But the spirited animal, frightened out of all reason by Berry's leap, and his master's wild cry of alarm, now spurned control, and darted forward at headlong speed, dragging the lines from Bonair's hands, so that the light trap rocked so wildly from side to side he could barely keep his seat by clinging to the edges.

He felt himself rushing to instant death, and in his horror over Berry's fate, he did not greatly care, though the instinct of self-preservation made him shout aloud while he clung desperately to the swaying vehicle that, after a mile or so of this tremendous rush, became shattered into pieces, mercifully enough for him, because he suddenly fell through the wreck to the ground, miraculously unharmed. The maddened horse still rushed forward with furious leaps, trying to rid himself of the fettering shafts that clung and hindered his flight.

He lay prostrate in the dust several moments, bruised, battered, and shaken, but, luckily, with no bones broken, so that presently he stood upright again, the only living thing in sight upon the lonesome road.

The moon and stars shone down upon him coldly, and the night winds

seemed to reproach him in subtle whispers.

“Where is she, the girl who trusted you, whose tender faith you shattered with your reckless words?” it seemed to say.

With a groan he looked backward, then retraced his steps with difficulty, he was so shaken up from the shock and the fall.

But he knew that he must find her, dead or alive, must restore her to her home, for which she had pleaded pitifully.

There was a great ache, deep down in his heart, a passionate repentance for his folly, a dawning love greater than any he had ever known in his wild career.

“If Heaven would listen to such a sinner, I’d pray to find her, living and unhurt,” he thought wildly. “Surely if my unworthy life could be spared, hers should be! Dear, little, innocent Berry!”

Toiling wearily and anxiously along the road, he regained the spot where Berry had sprung to her fate. With a wild heart-throb he saw her white figure lying prone on the ground.

“Not dead! oh, not dead!” he prayed wildly, as he bent over the prostrate form.

Still and white, and seemingly lifeless, she lay, poor little girl; but placing his hand above her heart, he felt a faint, irregular flutter that assured him of life.

He looked wildly about for assistance, his pale face transfigured with joy.

“Berry, dear little Berry, speak to me,” he cried fondly; but there was no reply.

The dark lashes did not lift from the pallid cheeks, the sweet lips did not open to answer his pleading cry, the little hand he clasped seemed already cold with approaching death.

“Oh, if some one would happen along! If I only had a vehicle!” he groaned, sweeping his glance up and down the lonely road for a sign of

life anywhere. But there was neither man nor house in sight, only unbroken vistas of trees lining the dreary road, and in the distance the prolonged baying of a hound that sent an evil shudder along his veins.

They were at least five miles from town, and he remembered with sickening self-reproach how he had promised Berry that it should be so short a drive, not over two miles at the longest.

“My accursed selfishness and vanity caused it all! If she dies, her death lies at my door,” was the thought that beat upon his bewildered brain.

Every moment of unconsciousness brought her death nearer and nearer; he realized it with cruel force. “Ah, Heaven, what should I do?” he cried, kneeling over her there in the dusty road, marveling even in his remorse and grief at the fairness of her pallid face.

There was only one thing to do—he must carry her back to town in his arms, since there was no other way.

Like Richard the Third, he could have cried out: “My kingdom for a horse!”

Realizing all the bitterness of his plight, he bent down and took Berry’s limp figure in his arms and started out to trudge the distance back to town.

Ordinarily this would have been no great feat, for Charley Bonair was an athlete of renown among his fellows. But he had got such a severe shaking up himself, besides partially spraining his ankle, that he was not very fit for the burden he now started out to carry.

He trembled under the weight of Berry, and the perspiration ran down his face in streams, while he had to hide his lips to suppress groans of agony, as the weak ankle now and then twisted under him so that he could barely proceed.

But he set his teeth, grimly, vowing:

“I shall take her home if I die for it. It is the only atonement I can make for my sin. How dared I think I could flirt with this pure, sweet little darling!”

He thought with wonder of her exquisite innocence and ignorance, of how surely she had believed at first that he really wished to marry her when she was so far beneath him in the social scale.

“I shall never forget her pride and anger when I showed her my real nature,” he thought ruefully. “Ah, what a strong sense of honor! How it put me to the blush! She is too good for me, sweet little Berry! It is better to marry Rosalind, who knows all my faults, doubtless, and is not very saintly herself.”

Suddenly he paused in distress, and looked about him.

The moon had gone under a dark cloud, the air had turned chill, a flurry of rain beat down upon him, groping in thick darkness with that dead weight in his arms. It was one of the sudden changes in September weather, capricious as April.

“We must get under shelter, somehow, somewhere!” he thought, looking toward the trees, then a cry of joy shrilled over his lips.

Among the trees he saw a light flare up like a precious jewel in the gloom. It came from the windows of a house.

He staggered toward it, drenched with rain, agonized at every step with his sprained ankle, and his mind in a tumult. How he gained the porch he scarcely knew, but he saw that it was a sort of tavern.

He stumbled on the steps and fell prone with his lovely burden.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BOOK OF FATE.

“Hello! What is this? Looks romantic!” cried a gay, female voice, as the owner ran forward, followed by several curious people, who united in concern for the drenched and hapless strangers thus cast upon their care.

With lively ejaculations of wonder, they got the pair into a large, shabby sitting room, where a troupe of stage people were making merry.

The most warm-hearted people on earth, they began, without any questions, to relieve their guests. Presently Bonair was able to explain reservedly:

“I was driving out with that young lady, a friend of mine, when my horse became frightened and ran away, throwing us both out. The accident happened about a mile back, and I carried the young girl in my arms, hoping to find a doctor somewhere.”

“There is one in the house and he has already gone to her assistance,” they told him.

“Tell him to save her life at whatever cost. I would give my own life to save that girl,” he cried anxiously, causing a sympathetic smile all around.

No one blamed him, for one look at Berry’s lovely face seemed to them sufficient excuse for the greatest devotion.

Meanwhile they found Bonair needing attention, also, for his injured foot was rapidly swelling and causing pain. The doctor came in presently and gave it the necessary attention, saying that his patient was reviving, and would presently be herself again, he hoped. There were some superficial bruises, but he hoped there was no internal injury.

“Thank Heaven!” cried Bonair fervently, pressing a roll of bills into the physician’s hand, while he added:

“If a covered vehicle can be had, I would like to take the young girl home to her mother, who may be uneasy at her delay.”

“But, my dear sir, that will be most imprudent; I should not like my patient to be moved until to-morrow. As for you, you might send word to her mother to come here.”

The young fellow shrank a little. He wondered how Mrs. Vining would take the news. He would doubtless get a sound berating from the old woman.

“But I have fully deserved it, and I will take my punishment like a man,” he thought grimly, and ordered the vehicle to be got ready quickly.

“There is a terrible storm raging—it is equinoctial weather, you know. Better wait till it clears up,” they said.

“No, I will not wait, if a man can be found to drive me. That poor mother will be very anxious,” he answered firmly.

In the teeth of the driving storm they set forth, but Charley Bonair never reached his destination.

The driver, a sulky-looking fellow, who had observed Bonair’s display of money at the inn, as well as his diamond ring, assaulted and robbed his passenger on the way to town, and left him for dead upon the highway.

When found the next morning, there was indeed but little life left in him —not enough to recognize any one, or to remember aught that had happened. Life became a blank to him for many days.

The return of his horse to the stable with the fragments of the trap clinging to the harness told what had happened to him, and no one suspected that a beautiful young girl had been his companion on that mad ride.

He could not speak and tell the story, for he lay ill and unconscious many days, and none guessed that the strange and continued disappearance of Berry Vining lay at his door.

The mother herself had found a plausible reason for her daughter's absence.

She believed that Berry had fled in anger over their quarrel that night, dreading lest she should be coerced into a marriage with the merchant tailor.

"We had a quarrel, and I believe she ran away in a fret. No, I don't think she has committed suicide. Berry wasn't that kind of a girl," she said, adding hopefully, "she has maybe gone and got a situation in a store in New York, and will write to me when she gets over her mad spell."

The neighbors accepted this view of the matter, and no one could gainsay it. Mrs. Vining's misfortunes with her children were an old story! She was always bewailing the disappearance of her handsome son by a former marriage: a son who had deserted her and gone none knew where.

Berry did not return, and no tidings came of her, but the deserted mother kept on at her work in patient sadness, hoping and praying for the welfare of her headstrong child, though too poor to make a search for the truant.

Thus the hand of Fate abruptly closed the first chapter in the acquaintance of Charley Bonair and the pretty village maid.

For when he recovered memory and consciousness far into October, they told him weeks had elapsed since he had been thrown from his trap and nearly killed, and that only the most skillful nursing had saved his life.

No one could answer the mute question in his eyes, for the secret of that night had never transpired, though he wondered how it had been so, saying to himself that Berry was a girl in a thousand to have held her tongue over such an accident.

"It is better so," he said to himself, in keen relief, yet he resolved he would write her a note of thanks, which he hastily did, only to get it returned with the information that Miss Vining was gone away.

When cautious inquiries brought out the reputed facts of her

disappearance, he was dazed with wonder. He made a secret trip to the old inn, but he found it closed and uninhabited.

It was a very bad moment that came just then to handsome, reckless Charley Bonair.

He was terrified at the mysterious disappearance of the winsome little beauty. He asked himself in an agony what had been her fate, cursing himself for having left her at the inn that night.

“What did I know of those people there? How dared I leave her unprotected among them? Judging from the fellow that robbed and nearly murdered me that night, the whole gang must have been rough and dangerous. Ah, little one, what has been your cruel fate?” he groaned to himself, tormented by the mystery that was so hard to fathom, because he dared not make any public hue and cry through fear of betraying Berry’s wild ride with him that, if known, must inevitably compromise her in every one’s eyes, despite her innocence.

The upshot of it all was that he went, privately, to a detective, and saying nothing of his real purpose, employed him to find out where the people had gone who kept the inn.

The owner of the house was found, and reported that the tenant, an old man, had died of apoplexy a month before. His servants were scattered and could not be found.

The identity of the theatrical troupe was next inquired into, and soon learned to be the Janice James Company. They could not be traced now, only in so far as that they had disbanded and scattered, some joining other companies, others going back to their homes, so that Bonair’s next move through the detective was to offer a reward through the personal columns of the New York papers for information regarding any member of the troupe. But weeks elapsed without bringing any reply.

Not even to the detective did Bonair confide his real motive for his quest. A new respect and tenderness for the girl he had tried to trifle with filled his mind, and made him as tenacious of her good name as if she had been his sister or his wife.

CHAPTER VII.

A SUSPECTED RIVAL.

“You may laugh at me for a superstitious girl, mamma,” declared beautiful Rosalind Montague, “but I shall always believe that postponements in love are ill-omened. Ever since the night of the lawn fête, when my lover failed to appear, and the fête was broken up by the sudden rainstorm that drenched all our pretty gowns, I have seen that something has gone wrong between Charley’s heart and mine. Do you know, mamma, he has never loved me the same, since his long illness?”

“Just your fancy, dear. To me it seems that he is yet ill and nervous after his terrible experience with his runaway horse that night. I have seen him start and turn pale when no one was speaking, as if from ghastly thoughts.”

“That is true, mamma, perfectly true, and he shudders sometimes when I barely touch his hand, and he is cold as ice to me, mamma, cold as ice. He seldom comes here, only when I send for him, and he never alludes to our engagement. Do you believe that his illness can have dazed his brain, that he can have forgotten?”

“It may be so—who can tell?” cried the proud old lady in velvet and diamonds. “I would sound him gently on the subject, Rosalind.”

“But, mamma, I should not know what to say, how to begin,” exclaimed the girl, with a slight blush.

“Oh, that is easy enough, dear—all roads lead to Rome! Ask him if he has any preference where to spend the honeymoon, or how long he is willing to wait until the wedding—or if he does not think your engagement ring is a little too loose—anything!”

“Thank you, mamma, I’ll stir him up somehow, for at present he is a very unsatisfactory lover. It almost looks as if I have a rival!”

“Oh, nonsense, dear, who could rival beautiful Rosalind Montague, the

belle of her set, who won the millionaire's son from a whole bevy of conspiring mammas and daughters!"

Rosalind smiled complacently at the flattery, and glanced at her reflection in the tall pier glass—a fair reflection, indeed, of a stately blonde with masses of flax-golden hair and large, blue eyes that could soften with love or flash with anger till they looked like points of blue steel. This delicate beauty, appropriately gowned in rich attire, had indeed made Rosalind the belle of her set, "the rose that all were praising."

It was the most natural thing in the world for Charley Bonair to fall victim to her charms, even if his pretty sisters, her schoolmates, had not conspired to bring it about, artfully throwing them together, ably abetted by Rosalind and her scheming mamma.

He was one of the greatest catches in fashionable society—the only son of the millionaire senator, and although Madam Rumor said ungracious things of him—that he was dissipated, profligate, libertine—what of that? He would inherit several of his father's millions, and could cover his wife with diamonds if he wished, so one must overlook the spots on the sun! Rosalind knew that she could not get a perfect husband.

To do the pretty Bonair girls justice, they were eager for the match, because they believed that marriage would reform their brother. And who so suitable a bride as Rosalind, their school friend, well-born, well dowered, beautiful, queenly, and secretly adoring the handsome prodigal!

So, among them all, they set a snare for Charley, and tripped him up. His battered heart succumbed easily. Rosalind had scored a triumph over all the beauties! Both families were charmed, and looked eagerly forward to the wedding day.

Right here was where Charley failed in loverlike duty, for he neglected to ask his betrothed to set the wedding day, apparently quite satisfied to make it a long engagement.

Mrs. Montague was not altogether pleased at his lukewarmness. To offset it, she planned the lawn fête to announce the betrothal. When the

fact became public property, he must name the day.

We have seen how fate stepped in between and foiled their plans, and how the ominous shadow of that night's disappointment hung over Rosalind's ambitious hopes.

"What has put this notion of a rival in your head, dear girl?" continued the mother curiously.

Rosalind hesitated a moment, and a cold, angry glitter shone in her eyes, as she whispered:

"Mamma, of course I know the hard things that are said of Charley—that he is fond of cards, women, and wine. Well, I happen to know that the very day of our fête, even by my very side, my lover was attracted by a new beauty, and could not hide his admiration."

"A new beauty—who?" demanded Mrs. Montague uneasily.

"You will be startled, mamma, but you will see that I am not jealous without a cause. Listen," and Rosalind poured out the story of the morning ride when Charley Bonair had bowed to and admired little Berry Vining.

"He said, to my very face, that she was the prettiest girl he ever saw, but I told him how poor and humble she was, and ridiculed his fancy. I found out afterward that he rode back from my side to the florist's, and sent her a great bunch of red roses. Was not that enough to make any engaged girl angry and jealous, mamma?"

"I must admit you are quite right, darling. Oh, what wretches men are!"

"Yes, indeed, and naturally after that I was jealous and suspicious. When he did not come that night I was almost wild, wondering if I was deserted already for the little village beauty. I did not sleep that night for anger and grief, though I was too proud to tell you until now, when I can no longer bear my trouble alone, because I am haunted always by two torturing questions."

"What are they, my love?"

"One is this, mamma: 'What became of that girl when she disappeared

so suddenly from home that night? And—did Charley Bonair know anything of her flight?'"

"You suspect him of treachery?"

"Have I not cause? How strangely she fled from home! How lame were her old mother's guesses at the truth! No girl could be forced to marry a rich old man against her will. Then again, mamma, how strange that Charley should be taking a ride miles out into the country that night, when he was overdue at our fête, where he was to be the guest of honor."

"You talk like a detective, Rosalind."

"Oh, mamma, do not ridicule me," the girl clasped her white hands, imploringly. "Think how much I love him, how much I have at stake! I have puzzled out all this in torturing nights when I could not sleep for jealous pain."

The proud woman of the world looked at her beautiful daughter, and a deep sigh escaped her lips. Stifling it with a sarcastic smile, she answered:

"It is the way of the world, my dear; men are wicked, and women are weak. It may be as you suspect, that he had a fancy for the girl, but you need not worry over that; you are the one he will marry, and he will tire of her and put her aside before your wedding day."

"But, mamma, I hate her! I would gladly see her dead, the little hussy! How dare she accept his love, knowing, as all the town knows, that he belongs to me! And who would have believed such a thing of little Berry Vining, who seemed such a good, innocent little thing!"

"Those good little girls like Berry are just the ones to be deceived and ruined by designing men, child. But put it out of your thoughts, love, do. We cannot alter the world nor mankind, and all I can say to you is that it's better not to brood over imaginary troubles. Bonair shall marry you, darling, never fear."

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVED AND HATED.

“Time put his sickles in among the days,” and the weeks slipped away and brought winter weather.

But long before the first snow, Charley Bonair had gone away from New Market, ostensibly for a yachting trip with some of his bachelor friends, leaving Rosalind piqued and angry.

For when she had asked him point-blank how long he wanted to wait before the wedding, he had answered debonairly, that she might take all the time she wanted. He guessed that both were young enough to wait a while. Anyhow, he wanted to have this bachelor trip with the boys before he thrust his neck into the matrimonial noose!

Rosalind, secretly furious at his indifference, was on the point of telling him to go and stay forever, but she bit the tip of her rosy tongue, keeping back the sharp retort, and half sobbed instead:

“Oh, Charley, I shall miss you so!”

“I should hate to think that you were lonely, dear, but I don’t believe you will be, for Lucile and Marie intend to have you with them in California for the winter months, after Christmas. Will you go?”

“Gladly, if you will promise to join us there when you come back.”

“It’s a bargain,” he answered, laughing, but none of her entreaties could prevail on him to fix the date of his return.

He did not really know, he said. It would depend on the other fellows. Meanwhile she was to enjoy herself in her own way; he would not find fault nor get jealous!

When he had gone away, she loved and hated him by turns, and she was more than ever sure that Berry Vining had stolen his heart.

“Oh, if I could find her, and were quite, quite sure of her guilt, I would wreak a bitter vengeance,” she murmured angrily, to the silent walls of her luxurious chamber.

She would have given anything to know the whereabouts of the girl she believed to be her rival.

It nearly maddened her to think that Charley might be seeing her daily, basking in her smiles, laughing with her, perhaps, over the deferred wedding. Her hatred of the young girl grew each day, until it became a passion for revenge.

“My day will come! Let her look to herself, that day!” she vowed bitterly.

She went one day to the cottage on pretense of getting a cloth suit pressed, and with pretended sympathy, asked Mrs. Vining if she had ever had any news of the missing girl.

Mrs. Vining wept as she declared that she had never heard any news of her daughter.

“She may be dead and buried for aught I know to the contrary, Miss Montague.”

“Perhaps she has eloped with a lover,” cried Rosalind, but the old woman frowned, and answered quickly:

“My girl was as pure and high-minded as the richest young lady in the land, miss, and she would never stoop to disgrace.”

“I hope it may prove so, indeed!” exclaimed Rosalind, from the depths of her jealous heart, and she went away, promising to send her maid with the tailor gown to be pressed.

The little cottage with the morning-glory vines all dead, looked dreary and deserted, and poverty-stricken; but poor as it was, the good widow could barely pay the rent. Rosalind could not help but think, as she walked away, that it was a poor setting for the lovely girl who had fled away from it rather than exchange it for the gilded misery of a loveless marriage, such as her mother had proposed.

One thing she had told Mrs. Vining earnestly:

“If you hear from your daughter, be sure and let me know, and I will make it worth your while. I take a deep interest in little Berry, you know.”

Aye, the interest of the hawk in the dove, proud beauty! The mother curtsied in gratitude, and thanked her for her kindness.

And just before Christmas she was startled to receive a note from the tailoress, saying she had heard from her little girl at last. She had run away to be an actress, because life in New Jersey was too dull and lonely. She had sent her mother a little money and a pretty picture of herself, and begged her not to be angry, but she was touring in California now, and it would be a long time before she came home again.

“In California—Charley’s own State. It looks suspicious,” muttered Rosalind, and she went over to the cottage to visit Mrs. Vining again.

But she did not find out anything more, for the letter had been mailed on a train, and Berry failed, perhaps by design, to tell her destination, adding in a postscript:

“I don’t ask you to write me, because I am always ‘on the go,’ but I have means you do not guess, of sometimes hearing of your welfare.”

“It is through him,” Rosalind thought bitterly, but she concealed her agitation, and congratulated the widow, prettily, on having heard from her daughter. Then promising to send her a handsome Christmas gift, she took leave.

Charley Bonair would have given thousands of dollars to know even what Rosalind had heard about Berry; for he had begun to mourn her as dead, and remorse stung like a serpent in his heart.

Always remembering that the man from the inn, who had robbed and tried to murder him, belonged to those people, he had decided they must all be cut-throats and robbers, and that Berry had most likely met her death at their hands.

With a heavy heart he landed from the yacht at San Francisco, deciding he would join his family there, and little dreaming the surprise awaiting

him.

CHAPTER IX.

BLUE EYES AND BROWN.

Senator Bonair's palatial home in the magnificent city of San Francisco was ablaze with light and gayety that night.

Though the millionaire owner himself was absent, in attendance on the session of Congress at Washington, his two handsome daughters, with their aunt, who chaperoned them since the death of their mother, had preferred remaining at home this winter, and were entertaining a house party. On this night they were giving a grand ball, and neither time nor money had been spared to make it a great success.

To make it more notable, the dancing was to be preceded by a theatrical treat, a play given by actors employed for the occasion. The private theater of the mansion had been refitted for the event, and a superb orchestra engaged.

To add to the pleasure of the evening, the manager assured his employers that an entirely new play would be given—one written by a member of his own company, a lovely young girl, who would herself play the leading part in her clever production, "A Wayside Flower."

All the invited guests were on the qui vive, for the entertainments of the Bonairs always surpassed any other given in the city, and hundreds of hearts of gay young girls and happy swains fluttered in anticipation.

As the time approached for the curtain to rise, not a seat in the small theater was vacant. Exquisite ball gowns and jewels gleamed everywhere, while the bright eyes of their wearers flashed upon their black-coated companions with swift coquetry.

Conspicuous among all, in a gown of white lace over azure satin, with rare pearls clasping her slender throat, and binding her thick waves of flax-gold hair, was Rosalind Montague, the honored guest of the house, the betrothed of the senator's only son.

Rosalind had never looked more beautiful, and one who was gazing at her from an obscure seat, an uninvited, unexpected guest, could not help but acknowledge it in his heart with a thrill of pride.

“Poor Rosy, I don’t see why I cannot love her better! She will make a bride to be proud of when I conclude to settle down and become a benedict.”

Why was it, as he gazed at her brilliant blue eyes and sunny hair, that dark brown eyes and curly chestnut locks came between him and Rosalind so persistently? Why would not memory down, when it was torture to remember!

She never could be his, the little brown-eyed cottage maiden, who had scorned him for his light love, and flung his roses back into his face. How the thorns had stung, as well as the lash of her little tongue, as she had berated him so soundly. Then when she had flung herself so desperately from his vehicle to almost certain death, could he ever forget that tragic hour? He stifled a groan, and shrank back farther into the shade of the tall palm near the door, where he had slipped into an irregular seat not in the rows. Oh, Heaven, what had been the mystery of her fate? Since he could not fathom it, why could he not forget? He must forget, he vowed, passionately to himself, for by and by, when he became Rosalind’s husband, it would be a sin to his blue-eyed bride for those haunting brown orbs to come between.

When he landed first in the city a whim had made him go first to a hotel, where, hearing of the entertainment going on at home, he had gotten himself into evening dress and arrived at the last moment, when his sisters, already in the box with Rosalind and other guests, were waiting, momently, for the curtain to rise on the first act in the play. It would not do to interrupt them now. Greetings must wait.

Anyhow, they were not missing him. Several men were in the box with them, giving attention and receiving it. He remembered he had told Rosalind he should not care how much she flirted, and she was taking him at his word.

The blue eyes as they looked upward to the dark-eyed man bending so eagerly to them, were very tender and languishing, and many a lover

might have been jealous, but Charley Bonair was not conscious of a pang. Although he felt a certain pride and sense of proprietorship in her beauty, he did not mind the other fellow's palpable admiration.

The chief thing that worried him now was that he was haunted by other eyes—brown eyes, soft with love, brown eyes, flashing with anger, always brown eyes! "Eyes it were wiser by far to forget."

Again he stifled a long-drawn sigh, and glanced at the curtain, for the blare of the orchestra had begun, and presently the play would be on. He remembered just then to look at the elegant program the usher had thrust into his hand.

He had barely time to see that the play was entitled "A Wayside Flower," when the orchestra ceased, and the curtain rolled up, showing the first scene.

He caught his breath with a gasp, and rubbed his eyes with a bewildered hand, then looked again to see if his vision had played him false.

CHAPTER X.

A TRAGEDY OF LOVE.

One easily guesses that “A Wayside Flower” was the story of a young girl —beautiful, but poor.

The rich hero’s fancy turned from his betrothed, the proud beauty, his equal in wealth and station, to the simple village maiden.

With all the arts of love he wooed her for his own.

When the maiden, pure as snow, turned in grief and anger from the proffer of the heart without the hand, he deceived her by a mock marriage, swearing her to keep the secret.

In the distant village, where they spent their blissful honeymoon, she somehow discovered through a letter he had dropped that he was betrothed to another, and the wedding day set.

Undreaming of treachery, yet grieved for her hapless rival’s sorrow, *Daisy* reproached her young husband for his flirtations, and insisted on his writing at once to the young girl to break off as gently as possible the engagement he could never now fulfill.

Carelessly assenting, *Chester* wrote the letter under *Daisy’s* eyes, sealed and addressed it, and pretended to have her post it to make sure.

But he had cunningly slipped quite another sort of letter into the envelope, and destroyed the one she had seen him write.

By and by came the time when he must leave her alone and return to his home, lest his rich father disinherit him on finding out the truth of his marriage to the village beauty.

He never returned.

For a while came letters filled with love and devotion, and always inclosing money for the little wife.

Weary months slipped away, and brought the winter snows. The deserted bride fell ill, and besought her husband to return to her side.

Blank silence fell. No more letters, no more money.

In the simple cottage where she boarded, the people began to hint at desertion. The villainous son showed her loverlike attentions.

When *Daisy* repulsed him in anger he showed her a letter from her husband that broke her heart.

Chester had written to the villain that the girl was not his wife. He had deceived her by a mock marriage. Now he was weary of her, and would see her no more. In fact, he was about to go abroad for years, and if he, the villain, would marry the girl, he would pay him handsomely to keep the whole thing quiet.

For the sake of her beauty and the bribe he was offered, this poor apology for manhood was ready to make *Daisy* an honest wife, but when she refused him with biting scorn he made his weak mother thrust her into the street, homeless and penniless in the winter's snow.

Daisy pawned her simple jewels and journeyed back to her deserted home and widowed mother, praying only to die under the roof that had sheltered her childhood and girlhood.

Then she heard that there was to be a grand wedding up at the hall that night. Her false lover was about to wed the beautiful heiress, his social equal, his chosen mate.

Poor little *Daisy* had been plucked as carelessly as a wayside flower, and thrown aside to die.

The poor old mother, half crazed by her daughter's shame and despair, cried bitterly:

"You have only yourself to blame, girl! I brought you up to shun rich young men; I told you they had no use for poor girls but to wreck their lives. You would not believe what I told you, you laughed at my warnings, and fled with the villain that ruined you. Now you have returned to drag out a wretched existence under the ban of scorn, while

he goes scot-free and weds another!"

The wretched *Daisy* knew that it was all true. She shut herself into her room, and brooded over her trouble till her brain went wild.

In the evening she came down to her mother, calm with the calmness of a great despair.

"I have thought it all over, dear mother," she said gently. "I did wrong to come back to you in my trouble; because you warned me and I would not listen. So I have no right to stay here and cloud your life with my shame and sorrow. I am going away forever. Good-by, dear mother. Say that you forgive me before I die!"

"What do you mean, child? Where are you going? What is this wild talk of dying? Come back, *Daisy*; mother will forgive you," cried the poor mother, but *Daisy* had fled through the door out into the cold moonlight, shining on a world that was white with snow.

"I must follow and bring her back. I scolded her too harshly," the mother cried, snatching her bonnet and hastening after her child.

But her poor, rheumatic limbs could not keep pace with *Daisy's* flying feet. She could not overtake her in time to prevent the tragedy.

The bridal cortège was moving out from the gates of the hall, and some little children belonging to the tenant were throwing flowers in front of the bridal carriage as it started toward the church where the fashionable throng was waiting.

The clear moonlight and lamplight showed *Chester's* face plain as day, as he sat by the side of the bride.

With a cry of reproach and despair that shrilled to heaven, *Daisy* darted into the road, and flung herself under the horses' feet.

But *Chester*, sitting there, pale and handsome, on his way to his wedding, had seen that lovely face upraised to heaven as she darted forward, had heard that terrible cry, and it pierced his false heart like an arrow.

He gave an answering cry, and tearing open the carriage door, as the vehicle swayed under the driver's frantic efforts to throw the horses back on their haunches, he sprang out and strove to tear *Daisy* from under their desperate hoofs.

The maddened animals dragged the reins from the driver's hands, and their steel-clad hoofs came down with a dull thud upon *Chester's* and *Daisy's* bodies as they writhed on the ground.

It all passed more quickly than one could describe it, and almost before the people in the next carriage knew that anything was happening the ill-fated pair were drawn from their terrible position, crushed and dying.

The frightened bride, reckless of her white gown and slippers, sprang out into the snow.

"Oh, what has happened?" she cried, in wild alarm.

Then she saw *Chester* prone upon the ground, with blood streaming from a cut in his head down over his pallid face, while he held to his heart the slight figure of an unconscious girl. The bride knew the pale face instantly. It was the little cottage maiden, who had eloped with a mysterious lover whose identity no one knew.

"Oh, *Chester*, what does this mean? What has happened to you?" demanded the bride wildly, and turning his heavy eyes on her face, he groaned:

"*Geraldine*, I have sacrificed my life to save this poor girl!"

"Why did you do it? What is she to you?" fiercely.

Like an arrow from a bow straight to her heart came his answer:

"The truth is cruel to you, *Geraldine*, but I feel that I am dying, so I must make a full confession. I deceived this poor girl with a mock marriage, then deserted her, returning to make you my lawful bride. Realizing her despair, she has returned and chosen to die beneath my horses' feet. I have given my life vainly in the effort to save poor little *Daisy*."

Geraldine realized that people were crowding round about her, that the white face of the "best man" was close to hers, his arms shielding her from falling to the ground, but she kept her eyes glued on that pale, dying face, and her ears strained not to lose a sound of that weak, dying voice.

"*Geraldine*," he faltered on, "I meant to marry you for wealth and position, but in my heart I loved *Daisy* best. I was not worthy of your love, but I pray you to forgive me, and to see that I am buried by the side of the girl who was my wife in the sight of Heaven."

He had thought little *Daisy* dead, but suddenly her dim eyes flared open and rested adoringly on his face. Her dulled hearing had caught words that made her ineffably happy.

"Darling!" he muttered brokenly.

The best man stifled *Geraldine's* cry of rage with a daring hand upon her lips.

"Forgive him, dear, you shall not miss him," he whispered tenderly. "Do you remember how we loved each other before that lovers' quarrel, when he came between? Now you know he was unworthy, let us begin again, dear. Tell him you forgive and will do his will."

Geraldine trembled at the warm touch of his hand, and bending over *Chester*, gave the promise he asked.

"I forgive you; you shall rest side by side," she faltered, not a minute too soon, for in another moment the lovers were both dead, clasped in each other's arms.

The first scene in "A Wayside Flower" showed the heroine singing a love song at a window wreathed in morning glories, and as Bonair gazed in wondering agitation, he saw that the singer's face was that of little Berry Vining!

CHAPTER XI.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

Clever little Berry had taken the one romantic chapter out of her own life's history and made a romance out of it, such as her sad heart and simple experience prompted—a trite little story enough, save for its tragic ending.

And as she had considerable histrionic ability, she was able to take the leading part with much credit to herself, winning enthusiastic applause from her audience.

She could not have acted so cleverly had she known under whose roof she was, and what eyes were gazing on her lovely face as she entered with whole-souled spirit into her part.

Charley Bonair stood apart to Berry in a little world of his own. She scarcely connected him with the millionaire senator of California, and his lovely sisters she had never seen. It was only the home of a stranger to her, this palatial house where she had come with her company to act for the pleasure of the ball guests.

Life had been a whirl to Berry Vining since the night when she had been carried senseless into the company of actors, who, charmed by her exquisite beauty, had easily persuaded her to join them on the road. Gifted with much natural dramatic talent, she had quickly "caught on" to the art, and now earned a subsistence by her work. In this arduous life, too, she could more easily put from her the memory of her shattered love dream, so brief, so bitter-sweet.

Yet in quiet moments it returned to vex her soul, so that she wove the beginning into a story of love and sorrow that grew and grew until her morbid fancy shaped it into a tragic romance.

Meanwhile the death of the leading lady gave Berry her position, and she had a chance to act her romance on the boards of the Bonairs' private theater.

It was easy to put her heart in it so wholly that the audience seemed to her like so many lay figures, and she dreamed not that Charley Bonair's eyes watched her, eagerly, from far back at the door, where an artificial palm half hid him from sight, while from a prominent box Rosalind Montague gazed in startled wonder, almost as if Berry had risen from the dead.

For it must be the little village beauty, the coincidence was too striking to admit of a doubt.

There sat the girl singing at the vine-wreathed window, just as on that September morning, when the gay cavalcade of riders went past, and Charley Bonair had turned her curly little head with his flashing glance and bow—singing, too, the same sweet lay of love and longing:

> "My heart with joy would thrill if you loved me,
> 'Twould give this life of mine its fill of ecstasy;
> Each golden moment spent with you on wings of Joy would flee;
> The sky would be a ceaseless blue if you loved me."

The gift of the roses followed next, and as Rosalind saw the fair girl in her white gown kissing the flowers, and fastening them in her hair and breast, she trembled with anger and jealousy.

"The little minx! She has dared make a play out of her silly flirtation with Charley," she thought; "she dares even to play it in his own home, hoping to meet his eyes again, but, thank Heaven, he is far enough away from here, he will never know."

If a look could have killed pretty Berry, she must surely have fallen dead upon the boards, so deadly was the hatred with which Rosalind watched her, for she thought:

"It is just as I suspected between Charley and her, the little hussy! He eloped with her, and, perhaps, was with her until he went on that yachting trip to shake off her fetters. It is doubtful if there was even any pretense of a marriage between them. No doubt she was eager enough to go without a wedding ring, thinking of the money she could cajole out of her rich lover. Oh, I see just how it is now! She is very clever, this Berry Vining—she came here trying to win him back, thinking he may

have got home again! Oh, how glad I am he is still away, for he would easily fall into her toils if he were here, the weak fool, carried away by every pretty face! How well she acts! I never dreamed it was in that cottage girl, such cleverness in writing a play, and then acting it. She is indeed a rival to be dreaded, and I must do something to get rid of her, that is clear. Even if Charley tired of her once, he would love her again in this pretty play that shows her off to so great advantage! Oh, what wretches men are, as mamma says! How they make a girl's heart ache with jealousy over their fickle love! If I did not love him myself, I would not care so much, but he's all the world to me, my Charley! What shall I do to get rid of her before he returns to the city? If mamma were here she would tell me not to mind, that it could never come to aught but a light love. But I do mind; I will not endure his unfaithfulness! If I thought no one could even find me out, I believe I could almost strike her dead before me, I hate her with such intense fury!"

"Rosy, how strange you look! You are pale, and your eyes gleam with blue fire. The poor girl's trouble seems to be getting onto your nerves! But she is really a very clever actress, and enters well into the part," exclaimed Marie Bonair, with a suddenness that made her start and tremble.

But she rallied herself, and murmured back:

"It's really quite thrilling, and I almost forgot where I was, dear. This was the third act, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and I'm almost sorry; I have been so interested. Every one else is, too. See how eagerly they keep their eyes on the stage. Our play was a great success. Well, we will soon come to the banquet, and then the dancing. Do you know that we have spread an elegant collation for the actors, too, in the small dining room?"

"How very nice of you, Marie!" murmured Rosalind, but to herself she added viciously:

"I wish I could poison that girl's wine undetected! I wish some of the stage properties would get on fire and destroy her beauty, anyway. Oh, anything that could happen to that girl would be welcome to me, so that he never saw her face again."

The fell spirit of murder had entered the jealous girl's heart!

The curtain rose again on the fourth act, and although the introduction of horses on the stage was a very difficult feat, still it was quite well done. The lovers died, gracefully, in each other's arms, and the widowed bride clung fondly to the attentive best man. In the vernacular of one of the troupe, the play had been a "howling success." The company was called back to receive the plaudits of the spectators, and the audience rose at the leading lady with enthusiasm, pelting the little beauty with flowers and jewels.

But one man far back in the theater, hurried away with his hat before his face.

"I hope no one has recognized me, for I really am not fit to join my people to-night. I must get away and collect my thoughts," muttered Charley Bonair.

CHAPTER XII.

A PHANTOM AT DAWN.

“An Indian seeress in an alcove off the western corridor will tell everybody’s fortune.”

The whisper ran from lip to lip at the banquet table, where the players were being feasted and wined by the hospitable Bonairs.

The gay, impressionable people of the troupe were charmed with the idea, and when they left the table they went en masse to the alcove, chaperoned by the housekeeper, who under orders from her mistress was doing the honors.

As they were admitted one by one to the alcove, the others, waiting in the magnificent corridor lined with tall palms, statues, and pictures, strolled about, peering into rooms and admiring the splendor of the palace where they were for the moment sojourners.

The housekeeper, a portly, loquacious woman, kept by Berry’s side, having conceived a liking for the lovely actress.

“Would you like to see the folks dancing in the grand ballroom for a minute or two? Come, then, I’ll give you a peep,” she said, leading the willing girl quietly away from the others.

The next thing they were out of doors, going along a quiet alleyway bordered with fragrant blossoming trees, and the sound of dance music came to them in a wild blare of melody.

“Here now, look in at this window,” whispered the woman.

Berry looked, and gasped:

“It must be fairyland!”

“’Tis grand, ain’t it, now?” replied the housekeeper. She watched Berry’s dazed eyes taking in the immense room with its costly fitting, tropical

decorations, and dazzling lights under which moved a hundred couples in each other's arms, to the tilt of the intoxicating waltz music, and smiled at the young girl's wonder.

"These Bonairs, you see, miss," she explained, "are the richest folks in California—what you call multi-millionaires—more money than they know what to do with! I've been housekeeper to them these twenty-five years. I came when they were first married. I was here when the senator's three children were born, and when his good wife died, and I expect to be here till I die. Have you ever seen any of the Bonairs?"

"Oh, no, never!" Berry answered absently, and the woman clacked on:

"Then I'll point them out to you if they come in sight. See that fat lady, with the velvet gown and diamonds, and the white pompadour? That is old Madam Fortescue, the senator's widowed sister, who chaperoned his two daughters, Misses Marie and Lucile, great beauties, both of them, and both engaged to marry rich New Yorkers. I think they mean to have a double wedding in the fall. It will be a great affair, you know. Their brother, Mr. Charley, is engaged, too, to a New York belle and beauty, and she's here now, the guest of the house—Miss Montague! Why, what's the matter, miss? You startled so!"

"Oh, nothing, don't mind me! Go on, please!" Berry managed to articulate, feeling as if the earth had heaved beneath her feet.

The truth had burst upon her so suddenly that only by the greatest effort could she keep her self-possession.

With the utterance of Miss Montague's name everything became clear.

She was under the roof of Charley Bonair!

She clung with both hands to the window ledge to hold herself steady, and listened with a dull roar in her ears, while the woman continued:

"Mr. Charley, now, he's away on a long yachting trip, and dear knows when he will be back. They do say he is sowing an awful crop of wild oats, poor boy, but he's good at heart, so he is. A dearer boy when he was growing up, I never saw! And that fond of pets, why he has a fine zoölogical collection on these grounds here. You wouldn't believe it,

maybe, but he's even got two bear pits, miss, and in one of them the bear has two new cubs. She's that savage over them, she would tear you to pieces if you touched one of them! And birds and smaller animals, now, you'd be surprised at the number. If you like to come here to-morrow, I'll take pleasure in showing you around. The little bear cubs, my but they are cute! And to hear Zilla, their mother, growling over them, it's a wonder!—makes cold chills run over one, sure enough!"

"They are running over me now!" gasped Berry, clutching the woman's hand with one that was as cold as ice. "I—I must go. Please take me back to my friends; they will be going back without me!"

"Oh, plenty of time, miss—you must stay till you get your fortune told, sure."

"Really, I don't care. I mean, I'd rather not," faltered Berry, trembling all over with a sudden nervous premonition of evil that shook her like an ague.

"Ah, don't be scared at the old fortune teller, dear miss, she may tell you something pretty," urged the good-natured woman, guiding the trembling girl back to the corridor and the alcove, where the last one was coming out, and the merry troupe were chattering like magpies.

"Oh, come, Miss Vane, she is waiting for you," the gay girls cried, pushing her in, and pulling to the curtains behind her.

The horrible old Indian seeress enthroned among draperies of Eastern tapestries, worth their weight in gold, and hideous in theatrical red light, clutched the girl's white hand, and peering at the rosy palm, began to mutter a sibilant jargon of fateful words.

And presently the actress, Vera Vane, who had risen from the ashes of Berenice Vining, flung aside the draperies and rushed from her presence, pale as a phantom at dawn.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ILL-FATED GIRL.

The merry actors and actresses all began to chaff Berry on her pale face and frightened eyes.

“She is actually scared!” “What did the old hag tell you, dear?” “She gave all of us fine fortunes!” they chimed in together. But Berry put them aside with a trembling hand, and sank, half fainting, into the nearest seat.

Mrs. Hopson, the housekeeper, came to her rescue.

“Don’t pester the poor child till she gets over her scare. Land sakes, miss, don’t take that nonsense to heart, please. Them old Indian squaws don’t know the future any better than you do!” she said kindly, but Berry did not hear the well-meant words. She had fainted.

When she came to herself she was lying on a cot in Mrs. Hopson’s room, and all the others were gone.

“You were so long coming around I told them I’d keep you all night, or send you back in a carriage when you felt better,” she explained.

“Oh, you are very kind. I—I think that I will go presently, when I am a little stronger. But do not let me, dear Mrs. Hopson, keep you from your duties. I can lie here alone, please,” faltered Berry eagerly.

“Very good, my dear miss, for I have many things to see to to-night, and I’ll be very glad to have you for my guest till morning,” returned the good woman, pressing a glass of wine on the young girl, and then going out with a promise to be back in an hour.

Left alone, Berry lifted her head and glanced eagerly at the clock.

“Midnight—it lacks half an hour to it yet. Oh, must I keep that strange tryst or not? Am I indeed menaced by so terrible a fate, and can this old Indian really prevent the doom by the loan of so singular a charm as she

offers? It seems very foolish, but I have heard my dear mother and her cronies often reiterate the same thing—that a person born with a caul over the face—that is to say, a thin membrane of skin that may be dried and preserved—is the fortunate possessor of a charm against drowning—that such a charm may be bought or loaned, and always proves a safeguard. How very strange; but there are many things we cannot understand! And what was it the old fortune teller said of me? I was fated to die a terrible death by water in twenty-four hours, unless I could procure such a charm. She possessed one herself that she would lend me for one week, when the risk would be over, but she must first go home and procure it, and she would meet me in the grounds on the northern walk going to the private zoo at the stroke of twelve. Shall I go? Is it worth while living when one is alone in the world as I am, for all my kindred now living are uncongenial to me, and there can never be any love story for poor, deceived Berry, who gave her heart too easily at first, but can never take it back again?"

With a bursting sob, the girl pushed back the heavy locks from her forehead, murmuring on:

"Can it be true, as that old hag assured me, that my dear, dear mother is dead? But she read my palm like an open book. I can see her yet peering into my palm, hear her cracked, sepulchral voice mouthing such dreadful words: 'Little girl, your rosy palm has all the secrets of your life clearly written there. You have drunk deep of the cup of love, but the dregs were bitter; you looked above you for a lover, but you had a beautiful rival, a high-born lady, who held his heart and his hand. Hopeless of ever winning your heart's idol, and destined by your mother to a marriage for money, you deserted your home, and fled far away with new friends. Is it not so?'"

"You have spoken the truth," sobbed hapless Berry. "Oh, I did not dream you could find all that in the palm of my hand. But now you have told me of the past, read me the story of my future. Tell me what awaits the most ill-fated girl in the world."

"You may well say ill-fated," croaked the hag, still clutching the little white hand, and peering into its lines as one reads an open book; "I read horror upon horror here, and—it is better not to know."

“Yes, tell me all,” cried Berry recklessly; “go on, go on!”

With a heartless chuckle the seeress muttered:

“Before I touch on the impending tragedy of your future I must return to the past. The old mother who loved you so dearly, whom you deserted so cruelly in her old age—that old mother lies dead!”

“Oh, no, no, no!” sobbed Berry, sinking to her knees in despair.

“It is true,” croaked the sibyl. “She lies dead, and her last word was a curse upon your wicked head.”

“Not wicked; oh, no—only weak and suffering,” moaned the girl. “Oh, mother, now I have indeed nothing to live for, nothing to love.”

“That is just as well, girl, for fate hangs heavy over your head,” croaked the hag.

“What fate could be more cruel than mine?” sobbed Berry wildly.

The old Indian wagged her turbaned head, muttering low:

“Death is the most cruel fate of all when it overtakes the young, the beautiful, the loving. It is death that menaces you, girl—death in a horrible form by drowning!”

“Why should I tremble at death? I have nothing but toil and sorrow in my life,” cried Berry wearily, with the tears running down her face.

Again the woman peered into her hand, replying:

“The doom is not a certainty, only a risk. It may be averted, and if you escape it, there will come a wondrous change in your life. There will be years of love and happiness and wealth before you.”

“You are sure, quite sure?” the girl cried piteously.

“It is written, and nothing can alter it,” cried the seeress, and Berry thought of some words she had read in a book of Eastern verses:

The moving finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on: nor all your piety, nor wit

Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.

She knelt there sobbing piteously, as a beaten child, and that cracked voice went on, and on:

“I can save your life, girl, and I will do it, because you are so young and so fair that I pity you. If you will meet me on the stroke of twelve down in the Bonair grounds in the northern walk leading to the private zoo, I will lend you for a week a charm against drowning—for nothing, because I pity you so. When the week is ended the danger will be past, and a long and happy life lies before you. Is it worth the trouble? Will you come?”

“I—I—yes, I will come!” faltered Berry wildly; then she fled from the hag’s presence, followed by a low, exultant laugh, and in the hall she fainted with the horror of all she had heard, believing that the woman must indeed be gifted with supernatural powers.

Now that she was alone, it all rushed wildly over her, and she knew that she must go to receive the mysterious charm that could avert her impending doom of death.

“I can go and be back again before the kind housekeeper returns,” she thought, slipping out of the room and stealing like a shadow along the dim corridors till she reached a door that led out upon the beautiful grounds into the calm, sweet night.

CHAPTER XIV.

COTTAGE AND CASTLE.

The beautiful California night, sweet and balmy, although it was March—how like a dream of beauty lay the grounds about Bonair, with their thick shrubberies and fragrant flowers!

Yet Berry, unused to nocturnal wanderings alone, would have been frightened only for the wild excitement that dominated every other emotion.

The full moon rode queenly in the cloudless sky, and shone like silver on the lovely scene—on tall groups of statuary, gleaming whitely against clumps of tropical shrubbery, on arbors twined with roses, on tinkling fountains, on tall, white clumps of lilies and beds of hyacinths, scenting the air with sweetness. All that wealth and taste could devise in this land so favored by nature, was here in lavish measure adorning the many acres of ground that surrounded the picturesque pile of magnificent buildings called Bonair.

And simple Berenice Vining, to whom all this was so new and amazing, caught her breath with a gasp, remembering that Charley Bonair was heir to it all—the only son of the proud multimillionaire.

She felt for the first time the vast difference between her and the man who had made careless love to her for twenty-four hours—love that was not great enough to bridge the gulf between the lowly cottage and the lofty castle, so that she might walk across it to his arms.

Her thoughts flew to the old home, to the humble cottage, with the morning glories climbing all over it in blue and white and roseate glory, and a yearning came to her for her little room again, with its cheap white ruffled curtains at the window, and the simple adornings so dear to a young girl's heart.

Her heart rose in her throat, and she had to pause and lean her head against a tree, while she sobbed in hysterical distress:

“Oh, mamma, mamma!”

Remorse throbbed at her bosom’s core. She had done wrong to forsake the dear old mother whose heart had been broken by her desertion.

“Alas, why was I not there to pray for her forgiveness? She was all I had to love me on earth! Those older brothers and sisters, they never cared for Berry. They always scolded and berated me because I was mamma’s pet; they said I was a spoiled child. None of them will ever care to see me again!”

She sobbed on brokenly, without noticing that the clock in the high tower had solemnly tolled out the midnight hour, when she was to meet the fortune teller and receive the charm that was to ward off her impending cruel doom.

She did not even notice, in her perturbation, the delicate odor of a fine cigar blending with the scent of the flowers close by, and she would have darted away in alarm had she dreamed that a young man was sitting on a rustic seat in a clump of shrubbery just back of her—so close indeed that she might have caught the sound of his quick breathing only that it was drowned by the tinkle of the fountain that, throwing its spray high in the air, fell back again like the low patter of rain upon the broad leaves of the lily-bordered pool.

But as for him, he had caught every word she uttered, and he knew every tone of the sweet voice, too, though he could not see her face as she clung there with her cheek against the rough bark of the tree.

It was Charley Bonair, sick at heart and troubled, who had hidden himself there in the solitude of the beautiful night to puzzle over the problem of his destiny.

He thought he had worked it all out before in the moonlight nights on the yacht, before he had landed from it at San Francisco. But that was when he had believed that Berenice Vining was surely dead, and that nothing remained but his duty to Rosalind.

Now it all rose again like a ghost that would not down—the struggle between his heart and his duty, for they did not agree.

His troth plight held him to Rosalind, his love belonged to Berry.

But the pure little cottage maiden would not accept the heart without the hand.

Now that he knew she still lived, his heart was in a tumult between love and pride and duty.

He did not wish to make a mésalliance. His pride clung to Rosalind, the heiress, and he felt he owed her all respect and duty.

But his code of morals was so lax that if he could have possessed Berry without a wedding ring, he would have been loyal to her, even while wedding her rival, and found a measure of happiness in the double life.

But so certain was he of the little maiden's stainless purity, that he knew it would be useless to reveal himself to her, although sobbing there in touch of his hand.

At the first sign of his presence he knew that she would fly from him in alarm and consternation.

He had come home determined to be good, and delight all his relatives by asking Rosalind to name the wedding day. He had decided that since Berry must surely be dead he could jog along quite comfortably with the blond beauty. Since neither one professed to be greatly in love, there would be plenty of ways for such rich people to keep out of each other's way.

All at once now he went back to his old resolve.

"I must marry Rosalind and be done with it. There would be no end of a bother with my folks, and probably disinheritance, if I cut the whole thing and married little Berry. Besides, Rose is a good girl, after all, and it would be a shame to break her heart."

Just as he came to this eminently virtuous resolution, and was softly rising to sneak away from the temptation of folding the sobbing Berry to his heart, there came an unlooked-for incident.

The sound of muffled footsteps suddenly paused by the tree, and a hoarse voice muttered impatiently:

“Why did you fail to keep the tryst, girl? It is long since the midnight bell tolled, and I grew weary of waiting.”

Berry gave such a convulsive start backward that the blossoming shrubs behind her were shaken, and dropped a shower of sweet flower petals to the ground.

“I—I—oh, I was so wretched thinking of my dear mother dead and my lost home, and the sorrows of my life, that I forgot everything else,” faltered the poor girl, with a dazed air. “What was it, please, you wanted of me?”

Charley Bonair was not going to leave just now, oh, no! He would stay and see what lark the girl was up to, anyway. Perhaps time had changed her, and she was not the good little angel of the past! Somehow he felt himself grow jealous at the thought, even while the quick thought came she might now be more to him.

Why did he feel all at once that he hated little Berry? Was it that she had destroyed his faith?

I deemed her the one thing undefiled
By the air we breathe, in a world of sin;
The truest, the tenderest, purest child,
A man ever trusted in.

What was this reproach for a tryst she had failed to keep? He would listen, he would learn her sin.

He leaned forward on his tiptoes, and got a good peep through the rose branches at Berry and her interlocutor. The latter looked like an old Indian squaw, picturesque draped in an old red blanket, with a feathered headdress over her seamy, swarthy face.

“Ah, a woman!” the young fellow thought to himself in keen relief, that made his heart throb tumultuously.

He heard the coarse, guttural voice replying cajolingly:

“Have you forgot so soon, girl, the charm I promised when I told your fortune, that was to avert a threatening doom, and bring to you wealth

and happiness?"

Berry gave a little cry of remembrance and pleading:

"Oh, I remember it all now. Forgive me that I forgot. Oh, I was so sad, so sorrowful, I could think of nothing but the tale you told me of the death of my old mother. Oh, is it really, really true?"

The agony of those upraised eyes was enough to pierce a heart of stone, but the old crone answered malevolently:

"It is true as that the moon and stars shine in the heavens to-night. She thought that you had fled with a rich young man, who meant to ruin you, and she cursed you for your sin and her disgrace."

"Oh, but I am innocent and pure as the day I was born! I pray Heaven that in death she knows the truth!" moaned the poor girl wildly.

"We have no time for all this rant! It is time for honest folks to be in their beds!" rejoined the Indian impatiently. Charley Bonair started, asking himself:

"Now, where have I heard that voice before, and that old saw in the same tone? It is strangely familiar, somehow, with a difference that baffles one!"

He heard Berry murmur again sobbingly:

"Forgive me, I did not mean any harm. Have you brought the charm with you?"

Then indeed Charley Bonair could scarcely keep from betraying himself by laughing outright.

"I left it around the path there in my bundle. Come with me and you shall have it."

"I thank you," Berry answered, simply and sweetly, and moved away by her side, a slim, white, girlish figure by the tall, grotesque figure of the other.

Bonair started to follow, then drew quickly back.

“It is none of my business to go spying on the dear, silly little girl,” he decided. “She must be in love with some other fellow now, by her anxiety over the old fortune teller, who knows no more of her future than the man in the moon. I’d better go back to the house and announce myself, and done with it! Hello, I’ll finish my cigar and drop around to my zoo, and see Zilla first. They wrote me she had two cubs and was savage as a lioness!”

He sauntered along in the moonlight when the cigar was lighted; but suddenly his repose was shaken by a terrible sound—loud, piercing shrieks coming from the direction of the zoo.

CHAPTER XV.

STRANGE MYSTERIES.

“The shrieks are coming from the bear pit! What if some one had fallen in there!” cried Bonair, turning suddenly cold as ice with apprehension, and starting at a wild run in the direction of the sounds.

As the housekeeper had told Berry, her young master had been fond of animal pets from boyhood, and had quite a choice collection of his own at the southern end of the park, where they were taken care of by a man and his wife.

In this miniature zoo there was an aviary, some prairie dogs, a monkey house, and some larger animals, including bears of different species. Zilla, the black bear, was his favorite. He had got her himself several years ago while deer hunting in the mountains of West Virginia. A handsome fawn, a black bear cub, and some smaller animals, were the trophies he carried home, and he had duly christened the cub Zilla, and petted her so much that she loved him with a doglike devotion. In his last letter from his sister Marie, she had told him that Zilla was now the proud parent of twins, and had become fierce as a lioness in defense of her young.

He had just started for the bear pit, idly wondering if Zilla would know him again after his absence of almost a year, when those frenzied shrieks of some one in deadly peril made him fly to the rescue in breathless haste, his heart sinking with a terrible dread.

Suppose it were little Berry herself that had unwittingly stumbled and fallen into the bear pit?

Oh, horrors! One blow of Zilla’s big paw would be sufficient to kill the lovely brown-eyed maid. In the twinkling of an eye, she would be dead!

There was one chance in a hundred for her life.

If he could get there before the fatal blow was given, if he could spring

down into the pit, and arrest Zilla's furious onslaught by the sound of his voice—the voice of the beloved master!

But would she remember him still? Would she yield obedience to his command in her new character of motherhood, filled with the instinct of protection to her young? If she would not, then woe unto any poor wretch who had fallen into her angry clutches!

With these thoughts in his mind he flew toward the zoo, with a wild prayer in his heart to be in time, just in time!

Every moment was an eternity, and his feet seemed to drag beneath him. He had never realized the value of a moment of time before.

But now life itself seemed to hang upon his haste.

Fortunately the distance was short, so that he covered it in a space of time less than five minutes—five minutes that might have been fatal, alas, for ere now the wild shrieks had died into silence more terrifying still—portentous silence in which the victim might have died.

At last! At last! After an eternity of time it seemed to him—he reached the scene of his suspicions.

He was right, for from the pit came terrible sounds, while all the varied denizens of the zoo, having been startled from sleep by the screams of fear, were making hideous din in their several voices, the uproar creating a sort of babel of the scene.

Over all shone the full moon in a cloudless sky, making everything almost as clear as day.

Bonair flung himself face downward, peering into Zilla's abode.

Down there was something white that could dimly be seen on the ground, while Zilla crouched over it, hitting pounding blows with her big paws. The other three bears who shared the pit were not taking any part, only walking about on their hind legs, expressing dismay and wonder by dismal and prolonged growling.

"Oh, Heaven, have pity!" Bonair cried wildly, and leaped into the pit.

He fell flat on his face, and Zilla's attention was quickly attracted so that the lifted paw, big, hairy, ponderous, fell nerveless as she turned desperately on the new intruder upon her domain.

Before he could struggle up to his feet, breathless from his race and the shock of his fall, the black bear dealt him a blow hard enough to knock the life out of him if he had not been nerved by a terrible anxiety that almost made him proof against her force. He got up feebly and clutched at her, muttering through a mouthful of blood:

"Zilla! Zilla!"

The name proved his salvation, for the huge black animal was opening her arms to crush him to her in a grip that meant death, but she paused in sudden indecision.

"Zilla! Zilla!" the man cried again hoarsely, entreatingly, his heart leaping to his throat in panting gasps.

A stifled moan smote his ear, but it did not come from Zilla, but from the still white something on the ground, and at the sound the bear turned toward it again with a ferocious growl.

But the great uplifted hairy paw did not fall, for with lightning swiftness, Bonair sprang forward, his fist shot out with terrible force and struck the animal just between the eyes, so that she lurched backward.

"Zilla, you devil, if you have hurt her, I will kill you!" he shouted, as he flung himself between them.

Madam Bruin, who had seen stars for a moment as his fist struck her face, now regained her feet, standing erect and menacing, but without making direct attack. She seemed dazed, stupefied, and a sort of shiver shook her huge black body.

As the moon shone down on the strange scene, she got her first look at the intruder, and she began to tremble more and more with the rush of instinctive memory. Bonair saw already that the battle was won.

"Oh, Zilla, you know me at last," he cried, in blended relief and

exultation, and added:

“Down, down, wretched beast, at my feet!”

Oh, wondrous change.

It did not seem possible that the maddened, murderous, plunging beast of a moment ago could be transformed like this into a tender, loving animal that groveled on the ground and licked the master’s hand with a quivering red tongue like a dog’s. But the transformation was wrought.

There she lay prostrate at Bonair’s command, conquered, humble, loving, her huge black body quivering all over, her whole attitude one of complete submission.

“Lie still, now,” her master commanded, roughly stroking her head, even while he turned in an agony of anxiety to that figure huddled on the ground the other side of him. He stooped down to examine it, and as he did so Zilla’s fury returned. She growled and half rose, but his restraining hand thrust her fiercely back.

“Must I slay you, beast?” he demanded, with a blow that forced her to be quiescent, while he made a further examination of the white something that after one moan had given no further sign of life.

Alas, his fearful heart had told him right.

It was she, Berenice Vining, the little maid who had stirred his heart to love’s joy and pain as no other woman had ever done before! Little Berry of the starry eyes and pure heart.

Gowned in simple white and seemingly lifeless, she lay, and he turned to find some implement to slay Zilla, in the rush of furious vengeance.

But the bear had slunk from him to the corner where her darlings whined in their soft nest, and he tripped and fell in his agitation—not in a pool of blood, but upon a soft mass of wool—the thick red blanket he had seen on the Indian fortune teller when she had come to drag Berry away to this hideous doom.

He comprehended that the woman had thrust Berry down to this awful death, and that in the life-and-death struggle, she had dragged down

with her the scarlet blanket.

But why, why, why, had the old hag thirsted for this beautiful, innocent young life? was the question that struck him like a blow in the face.

He knelt down by her in anguish; he put his hand beneath her face and turned it to the light.

Fortunately there was no mark or bruise upon it to mar its lifeless beauty, but the lids lay heavy and dark on the white cheek, and the heart, when he laid his hand over it, had no pulsation. He had come too late. Zilla's blows had battered out the life from the beautiful body!

Charley Bonair groaned in anguish.

"Dead! Dead! Poor little darling; sweet, pure child! How could so slight a form survive those thudding blows I heard as I dropped into the pit? They shall die for this, the old hag who flung her down to her fate, and the murderous Zilla, who finished her work! Now there is nothing left but to take her out of this accursed hole back to my home, my last dead love, my little Berry, whom fate placed beyond my reach. Ah," the tone changed to one of horror, as a bullet whizzed suddenly down into the pit past his cheek and buried itself in his shoulder.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TIMELY RESCUE.

How closely joy and sorrow tread on each other's heels, how nearly they touch each other!

Up at the splendid Bonair palace the music and dancing went on apace, Lucile and Marie being all in ignorance of their brother's proximity and peril.

His presence in the theater had been unobserved, and none dreamed of his return.

The splendid fête went on, and the music of the orchestra and the sounds of flying feet drowned the shrieks of mortal peril that arose from the bear pit.

It seemed as if Charley Bonair and Berenice Vining, both victims of some mysterious enemy, must perish for want of a helping hand in this hour of terrible danger.

It must have ended thus in speedy death, had not the tumult of the bear pit been overheard at the small cottage near by, where the zoo keeper and his wife made their home.

The woman, a lighter sleeper than the man, had been half aroused by the sound of Berenice's piercing shrieks.

She raised her head from the pillow and listened intently for a moment, and cold chills of terror ran down her spine at the agony of those fearful cries, as of one in mortal peril.

"Oh, surely there's murder being done somewhere very close," she groaned aloud, and now thoroughly aroused, proceeded to shake her husband awake.

"Wake up, wake up, Sam Cline; don't lay there snoring like a pig, when somebody's getting killed, sure! Wake, wake, wake!" she exclaimed, and

to expedite the awakening, she sprinkled his face with cold water, which soon had the desired effect.

“What’s broke loose Mandy, hey?” he exclaimed, in bewilderment, and she answered:

“Sam, there’s been the most terrible screams coming up about the zoo, and now I can hear everything there roused up and making the most fearful din—enough to split your ears open. Listen, don’t you hear it yourself?”

“I’d be stone-deaf sure if I didn’t hear all that racket! Suthin’ dreadful must ’a’ happened, sure! I’d better dress and go up and see!” he answered, hurrying into his clothing.

“I’ll go with you,” declared Mandy, throwing on a wrapper, and thrusting her bare feet into slippers, without more ado, they rushed in the direction of the zoo, getting near enough when the shot was fired down into the bear pit to see a tall, white figure running away in breathless haste.

“Somebody’s trying to kill the bears, sure! I wonder what for, now!” gasped Mandy, almost breathless with her speed.

“Run! run! let’s catch her, the wretch!” panted Sam Cline, but the white figure, having the advance of them, seemed to fly like the wind, and quickly disappeared from sight.

Meanwhile as they rushed on, amid the babel of varied animal sounds, they came to the bear pit, and their further pursuit of the criminal was arrested by hearing a human groan, mingled with the hoarse, frightened growls of the brutes below.

How it all ended, Sam Cline related in his own words somewhat later, when he carried the news up to Bonair, calling Mrs. Fortescue out for the purpose.

“Land sakes, ma’am, a terrible thing has happened down to the bear pit,” he began excitedly. “Mandy and me was woke up by awful screams from down to the zoo, and then all the birds and beasts got scared, and sech a racket was never heard before, I reckon!—leastwise in the hour

of midnight, when everything is s'posed to be still and asleep. Well, wife and I rushed out as fast as we could to the scene, and next thing, zip—bang! went off a pistol right in front of Zilla's pit, and we saw a woman all in white running away like mad! We gave chase, but she had the start of us too far, and disappeared in the shrubbery jest as we got to the pit, and heard a terrible groaning that made us stop to investigate." He paused for breath in his rapid narration, and the handsome old woman shuddered with prescient dread.

"Go on, go on!"

Sam Cline cleared his throat, and continued:

"We peered down into the bear pit—and, oh, what a sight was there, ma'am! All the bears in an uproar with fright and excitement, and in the midst of it all two people, a man and a woman, as we could see by her white dress. Well, we called to the bears, and they quieted down, knowing our voices so well, and then, I swear to gracious! I nearly jumped out of my skin with surprise, for a voice called out to me that I know as well as I know my own, and said, with a groan:

"'Sam Cline, for Heaven's sake, open the door and let us out of this den.'"

"A voice you knew?" repeated Mrs. Fortescue questioningly, but the man hurried on, in a voice broken by excitement:

"You may be sure that Mandy and I obeyed him fast enough, ma'am, and found out when we got in the pit that the man had been shot in the shoulder, and that the woman with him was apparently dead."

"This is terrible!" shuddered Mrs. Fortescue.

"I should say so, indeed, ma'am," answered Sam Cline, continuing. "The man told me he heard screams from the pit, and running to it, saw the woman being beaten to death by Zilla. He jumped down to her rescue, but just as he got the bear subdued, somebody fired down at him, and the ball went through his shoulder. He sank down with the pain, and grew weak with the blood spurting from the wound, just as we discovered him. Well, to make my story short, I tore off my shirt and bandaged his wound, Mandy fighting off the bears that went wild at

smelling the blood. Then I took the dead woman in my arms, and Mandy led the half-swooning man, and so we got them to my cottage, and I telephoned for a doctor as soon as I could, and next thing, I posted up here to break the news to you and the young ladies about their brother."

"Their brother!" exclaimed the old lady wonderingly, and he answered quickly:

"Yes, ma'am, their own brother, Mr. Charley Bonair, shot through the shoulder, and so upset by all he went through in the pit, that as soon as we got him in my house he fell down by the couch, where I laid the dead woman, and swooned with excitement, so I just left Mandy to revive him while I telephoned the doctor to come, and posted off up here."

Mrs. Fortescue, pale and trembling, cried faintly:

"Are you sure you have not made a mistake, Sam Cline? My nephew is not even in San Francisco!"

"He landed from the yacht early yesterday evening, ma'am—he told me so—but he had not spoken to his sisters yet. He was in the grounds, coming home, I suppose, when he heard the shrieks from the pit, and ran to the lady's assistance," explained Sam Cline quickly.

"And the lady? Did you know her, Sam?"

"Not her name, ma'am, but her face. She was that pretty little actress that played in the theater here last night. I knew her again as soon as I clapped eyes on her face, but I don't know as I ever heard her name."

"This is wonderful, mysterious!" cried the lady. "Oh, what shall I do? It seems too bad to break up the ball with this shocking news, but there seems nothing else to do."

Sam Cline hesitated, then said humbly:

"If I might make so bold as to advise you, ma'am, I'd say let the ball go on, because it won't last much longer, anyway, I guess, and see Mr. Bonair yourself before you alarm his sisters."

"I believe you are right, Sam; I hate to stir up a panic in the ballroom if I

can avoid it. Wait outside for me till I get a wrap, and I will go with you to the cottage and see Charley."

If she had cherished the least doubt of it being her nephew, she soon had proof of it on reaching the keeper's cottage, for Mrs. Cline had succeeded in reviving the patient, and he lay pale and nervous on a narrow cot in the same room where they had placed the seemingly dead actress upon a neat white bed.

"Charley, dear, this is terrible!" the lady cried, sinking down on her knees and kissing his pallid brow, damp with the dew of pain.

He took the kiss impatiently, crying fervently:

"Aunt Florence, do not think about me! I'm all right, sure!—see about that poor girl over there, please! Is she really dead, or only in a very deep swoon? By Heaven, if Zilla has killed her, I'll put the brute to torture, I'll burn her at the stake!"

He ended with a groan of commingled fury and stifled pain, and just then there came a loud rap upon the door. The physician had fortunately arrived.

CHAPTER XVII.

BITTER RIVALRY.

He had his hands full certainly, with his two patients, for Charley Bonair insisted that he should examine the young lady first to see if there were the least hope of her recovery from the swoon or unconsciousness that seemed to them all so terribly like death itself.

When Madam Fortescue returned from the cottage two hours later, the grand ball was ending—the "dear five hundred friends" tearing themselves away.

With commendable self-possession she received their adieus, and waited till her weary nieces had got into their dressing gowns before she called them together and imparted her important news.

Lucile and Marie were sadly frightened, and tears flowed fast from their beautiful eyes.

"Poor, dear brother, we must go to him at once," they cried, but Madam Fortescue forbade it.

"No, the physician wished him to rest quietly to-night in the care of Sam Cline, but you both will be allowed to see him to-morrow. The wound is not necessarily dangerous, but it is better for him to remain a day or two at the cottage before he comes home."

"And the pretty little actress—Miss Vane. Do you say that she revived?" cried Marie.

"She has shown signs of life, that is all. The poor young girl's body is a mass of bruises. He did not find any broken bones, however, and says she owes her escape from that to the thick red blanket of the murderous old squaw that fell down on her, and formed with its folds a cushion against the fury of Zilla's blows."

The two young girls shuddered with horror over the story. They

recalled the bright beauty of the sparkling young actress with keen admiration, and realized the difference now with heartfelt sorrow.

“She must have a good nurse and every possible attention to restore her life. We will charge ourselves with all the expenses, poor girl,” they exclaimed.

And then they fell to wondering about the criminal. Who was she—how had she happened to be at Bonair?

The young girls declared solemnly that they had not employed any fortune teller, had not known of her presence in the house. It was a decided mystery.

“Perhaps the housekeeper may know something about it,” suggested the aunt.

Mrs. Hopson was summoned and cleared up the little mystery.

She told how Miss Montague had called her out while the banquet was in progress, saying that an old Indian fortune teller had called and offered her services to aid in the evening’s entertainment.

Miss Montague was so pleased with the idea that she had engaged the old woman at her own expense to remain two hours and amuse the theatrical company after the banquet. She had asked Mrs. Hopson to prepare the little alcove for the seeress, and to apprise the members of the company of the treat in store for them. Mrs. Hopson had consented to the plan, and Rosalind had left her, after cautioning the housekeeper to say nothing to her mistresses of the little plot, saying she wished to defray all the cost herself.

Mrs. Hopson went on and told of the fright the young actress had received on hearing the story of her future from the old seeress, and of how she had taken her to her own apartments to spend the night, but returned to find her missing.

“It irked me to find her gone, but I never thought of danger to the sweet, pretty young girl,” she declared, adding:

“Now it seems to me that there was some deep-laid plot to injure the

young actress. That old Indian woman was very likely a disguised enemy that sought her life. Failing to frighten the girl to death with her terrible prophecies, she got her out of the house some way and pushed her into the pit to meet her death from the angry black bear. When she saw that rescue was likely, she made one last desperate attempt at murder by shooting down among the bears. Oh, the vile wretch, she should be torn limb from limb! No punishment is too great for such a fiend!"

"Yet, I doubt if she will ever be apprehended. She has had ample time to escape and cover up all traces of her identity," sighed Madam Fortescue, wishing from her heart that the wretch might be brought to justice.

"Oh, how grieved, how dismayed Rosalind will be to hear all this," cried Lucile, with tears. "Only think, when she was generously planning such a pleasure for those people out of her own purse, she was vilely imposed on by a murderous wretch who nearly destroyed two lives. Why, if dear Charley should die, dear Rosalind would feel like a murderess, although she did not even know that he was in the city."

"But where was Rosalind all the evening? It seems to me now that I do not remember seeing her at all in the ballroom," exclaimed Madam Fortescue.

"Why, poor Rosie had a little chapter of accidents that spoiled her whole evening," answered Marie. "In the first place, she became suddenly ill, soon after the dancing began, and had to retire to her room to lie down a while. It was one of those terrible headaches, you know, that will only get better in a dark, quiet place, so she said we must leave her alone, as she should lock her door and must not be disturbed. Well, something after midnight she returned to the ballroom, and was better, but looking so pale and ill yet that I was surprised to see her dancing again. But pretty soon she came to me all angry and nervous, and I could not blame her at all. Some one had torn a great rent in her white lace gown, and she had to retire, and she said she would not appear again, because she was too tired to change her gown. Poor thing, I hope she will sleep off her sickness by to-morrow, so that she can go with us to see Charley."

“It will give her a terrible turn to hear of all the mischief that old fortune teller did, but it cannot be helped now,” remarked Mrs. Hopson.

Then they all separated for the night, or rather morning, since it lacked but a few short hours to daylight.

As Miss Montague was the latest of all arising, and took her coffee in her own room, it was very late afternoon before the two sisters came in and told her their startling news.

She was quite as much dismayed as they expected, and when she heard that it was her betrothed, Charley Bonair himself, who had been wounded in the pit, Rosalind fainted away in dead earnest. When she revived she was almost hysterical.

“Do not tell me he is dead, my love, my Charley, or my heart will break!” she moaned in anguish.

When they told her he would get well, that they had been down to the cottage already to see him, and that he was resting easily, she smiled again.

“Oh, I am so glad, so happy, that he is spared to us! But, dear girls, will you not bring him home now, at once? I wish to see him so much! Did he ask for me? Did he send me any message?”

The sisters were so sorry for her that they hated to tell her the truth, that Charley had not even called her name.

But after confessing it they hastened to make excuses for their brother, saying he was so ill and feverish it was no wonder he had temporarily forgotten everything but his own sufferings.

Rosalind accepted their explanation with outward complacence, but the hot fires of jealousy seethed madly in her heart.

To herself she said bitterly:

“He did not ask for me, because he does not care, he thinks only of her, the little witch who stole his fickle heart from me! How strange, how very strange, that he should have been on the spot to save her life! He must have known she would be here, and followed to bask in the light

of her eyes. Oh, how I hate her! Why does she not die, why should she live to balk me of my happiness, for the whole world is too narrow for my rival and me!"

In her angry thoughts she almost forgot the presence of the sisters, and they were startled by the lowering frown upon her face, realizing that she was bitterly disappointed at getting no message from Charley.

They hastened to tell her that the physician would not permit him to leave his bed yet, but that they would accompany her at any time to see her lover, assuring her that he would be charmed with the visit.

Rosalind believed quite otherwise, but she kept back the bitter words between her lips, resolving to go, indeed, to visit him, and to hurry up their marriage if she could, before the pretty actress got well.

Of the poor girl hovering between life and death, and all unconscious of her surroundings, she said not a word in pity, and when she was asked about the Indian seeress who had wrought such woe, she declared that she had never seen her before that night, and knew nothing of her whereabouts.

"Oh, I hope none of you will blame me for what she did!" Rosalind cried artlessly. "I am not to blame, for I only thought to give pleasure. The woman came to me as I leaned out of a window, and proffered her wish, and I immediately granted it. How was I to know that at heart she was a fiend?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

Rosalind's sorrow, so prettily acted, had its due effect. Her friends quickly acquitted her of all blame, and hastened to soothe her ruffled feelings by praising the good intentions that had prompted her terrible mistake.

The Bonairs hated anything like notoriety, and they tried very hard to keep the sensational events of that night out of the newspapers.

But their efforts failed of success, and the reporters reaped a rich harvest.

When the manager of Berry's company came the next day to inquire for his missing star, he was astounded to learn through the voluble housekeeper of the tragedy of the previous night.

He went quite white, and trembled with the shock, and as he was rather young and very handsome, Mrs. Hopson surmised that he must be the young girl's lover, and pitied him very much.

He cried out hoarsely:

"Barely alive, you say, with but one chance in a hundred for her life? Oh, how terrible! I can scarcely credit it, unless I see her with my own eyes!"

He went from the mansion to the cottage, and Mrs. Cline permitted him to see the poor, unconscious girl upon the bed, breathing so faintly that it seemed as if every pulsation must be her last.

"Dying, poor girl, dying! And I loved her, oh, I loved her better than my life!" the man cried, sinking on his knees by the bed, and pressing his lips to the cold little hand that lay outside the cover.

"Then you were going to marry the poor young lady?" asked Mrs. Cline.

“No, for she had rejected my suit, telling me she had loved once and her faith had been destroyed forever. She was very unhappy, I know, over her broken lovedream, but I still hoped on, believing that in time she might forget her false lover and turn to me. In all our leading parts I was cast as her lover, and I threw my whole soul into everything, hoping to win her at last. Alas! all is over, and her sweet life has fallen beneath the machinations of a cowardly enemy,” the man moaned, staggering up to his feet, with a look of despair that touched the woman’s heart.

“I am so sorry for you, sir,” she murmured, putting the corner of her white apron to her eyes, that were wet with tears.

He thanked her with a look, and added:

“While she lives, Mrs. Cline, see that she receives the best of attention, and look to me to settle all expenses to—the last!” his voice breaking over the word.

“Oh, sir, the Bonairs have already pledged themselves to pay everything. A trained nurse is coming within the hour, and the physician will be in frequently,” she replied.

“May I see Mr. Bonair? Will you take my card to him?” asked the manager.

She assented, and he was kept waiting some time, while she related to Charley Bonair every word he had uttered, faithfully describing the emotion he had displayed.

Charley Bonair was lying on his couch very pale and restless, and he grew almost ghastly as the tale ran on.

“That will do, you may bring him in,” he said, at last.

The next moment:

“Ah, Mr. Bonair, will you pardon this intrusion?”

“You are welcome, Mr. Weston. Pray be seated,” Charley answered quietly, gazing hard at his handsome rival.

Truly he was handsome and manly, with that dark, flashing eye that so

easily wins its way to a woman's heart. Charley Bonair wondered jealously that Berry had been able to withstand its fascination.

"Dear little one, surely she loved me well," he thought, with a twinge of the bitterest remorse and pain.

The manager had somewhat recovered his self-possession that had wavered in the presence of his dying love. He did not give way as before Mrs. Cline, but conversed easily and with a sorrowful dignity that impressed the hearer, against his wishes, with profound respect.

"A dangerous rival, and perhaps more worthy of her than I am," Bonair said to himself, with a sweeping self-contempt new and withering.

If she lived, poor little Berry, who could tell but that such devotion might win her at last?—but he groaned aloud at the thought.

"Your pardon. A twinge of pain in that confounded shoulder," he explained.

"Permit me to praise your acting last night," he added. "It was superb, and, in fact, your company is an admirable one."

"I thank you, but we are almost ruined now by this terrible happening. No woman in my company is capable of taking the leading part at short notice. I shall arrange to pay the company a week's salary in advance, and disband for an indefinite time."

"You must permit me to assist in the financial part; I feel it my duty, and will make it my pleasure. I cannot forget that the disaster came to you through your appearance at my home last night," the wounded man said cordially.

But the manager declined the offer with a proud, though gentle, dignity, winning more and more Bonair's respect.

"I thank you, sir, but I must decline your offer, since I am amply able to meet these expenses," he said, adding after a moment's hesitation:

"Whatever you may choose to spend in tracing Miss Vane's cowardly murderer will be well spent."

“No expense will be spared for that,” Bonair promised, growing so pale again that the visitor felt he was staying too long, and took a courteous and sympathetic leave.

It was a nine days’ wonder in the papers, and the reporters “worked the story for all it was worth.” Meanwhile the Weston Company became so interesting to the general public that the next cleverest actress studied Berry’s part, and the new play, “A Wayside Flower,” ran successfully for weeks upon the boards of a popular theater.

All this time Berry was lingering between life and death from the terrible pounding Zilla had given her in the bear pit, but at last the wavering balance began to incline toward life, gladdening many anxious hearts, but filling one, alas, with malignant hate.

For Rosalind’s jealous hatred waxed hotter every day, and could she have found a chance to be alone in that sick room for five minutes, it is hard to say what might have happened.

But a young princess could not have been guarded with more loving care than the poor little actress, and it was all through Charley Bonair that this was so.

He employed two competent nurses for the sick room, and one or the other was ordered to remain always in the girl’s apartment.

“We must remember always that she has a cruel and unscrupulous enemy thirsting for her young life,” he said. “That enemy may be hovering about, watching for an opportunity to complete her murderous work. She must be foiled in her terrible designs,” he said firmly, and Rosalind, who heard the words, turned aside to hide a cruel sneer that parted her crimson lips.

She was disappointed in all her crafty little schemes for entrapping him into marriage before Berry recovered. It was plainer to her than ever that she had lost every hold she had upon him, and she dreaded every day that he would ask for a release from his engagement.

Rosalind said to herself that when that happened she was afraid she would go mad of her anger and despair.

A jilted bride! How could she bear the stigma, how turn aside the jeers of her little carping world?

“I cannot, I will not release him if he dares plead to me. I will hold him to his promise, and he dare not back down!” she vowed bitterly.

Charley Bonair’s convalescence was so slow that every one became uneasy, not dreaming that he played a deceitful part in order to remain as long as he could beneath the same roof with Berry. Besides, as he said to himself, he could hold Rosalind off better that way. Though she came every day with his sisters to visit him, he frequently pretended to be too ill or nervous to receive them till at last his doctor rallied him soundly.

“What game is it you are playing, Bonair? You were well enough two weeks ago.”

Before Bonair left at last, the nurses permitted him to sit a half hour in Berry’s room watching her as she slept, with the dark silken lashes prone upon her snowy cheek, and the breath just stirring the white folds of her breast.

The sight went to his heart, stirring it with profound emotion, so that he said to himself:

“How can I dream of ever wedding any but this beautiful creature, my soul’s true mate? She must be mine alone; I must break with Rosalind!”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OLD LOVE.

"I must break with Rosalind! I can wed no other than sweet little Berry, my soul's true mate!" Bonair cried passionately, again to his own heart, when he was back in his palatial home, leaving Berry at the lowly cottage of the zoo keeper.

All the puerile questions of wealth and position that had held them apart became dross in his eyes, swept away in the torrent of a love that would no longer brook opposition to its restless force.

Perhaps jealousy of Berry's handsome lover, young Weston, added fuel to the fire of his love, but it began to burn with a consuming flame that destroyed everything in its path. A gifted poet has fitly portrayed the state of his mind:

When the court of the mind is ruled by reason,
I know it is wiser for us to part;
But love is a spy who is plotting treason,
In league with that warm, red rebel, the heart.
They whisper to me that the king is cruel,
That his reign is wicked, his law a sin,
And every word they utter is fuel
To the flame that smolders within.

His dread of Rosalind's grief and anger seemed to vanish before the new force of his passion for Berry, and he said to himself grimly that he must have it out with Rosalind, and be done with it. It was best to "be off with the old love" before he was "on with the new."

The opportunity came soon.

His sister Marie privately lectured him on his indifference to his betrothed.

"How can you be so cruel to poor Rose? You treat her like a stranger."

“Has she complained of me?” he asked evasively.

“How can she help it? The dear girl is miserable at heart, although she bears up bravely. You know every one is caviling because the wedding day is not set. Why don’t you settle it once for all, Charley, dear?”

Her coaxing arms were round his neck, her bright eyes beaming into his, and he sighed:

“Girls are always dead set on weddings! I don’t see why! I think them great bores myself!”

“Then why don’t you get yours over and be done with it?” persisted the girl.

“Oh, I am not in any hurry to lose my bachelor freedom, sis; I fancy Rose would henpeck me dreadfully,” yawning.

“She would not, I’m sure—that is if you behave yourself, sir! Of course you would have to give up some of your bad habits if you were a married man—flirting, for instance—and—and—drinking! You are a little too fond of the winecup, aren’t you, now?”

“Yes—if you say so,” he replied nonchalantly, taking his lecture coolly, and adding: “I wonder if Rose is going to write out a list of musts and must nots for me to sign on the wedding day; do you know?”

“Oh, nonsense! Go and ask her if you want to know! She’s in the library now, half crying because a girl asked her if her wedding would be soon, otherwise she wanted her to make one of a house party at her home this fall. Don’t you see how embarrassing the uncertainty is, Charley?”

“Yes, I see. We must have an understanding about it,” he replied, with a sudden gravity that emboldened her to add:

“Only yesterday Rosalind refused a proposal that was exceptional, in every way, and when she told me of it she half sighed: ‘He’s very nice, and if I had not been engaged to Charley, I might have said yes.’”

“It isn’t too late to call him back. I’ll tell her she may do so!” he exclaimed eagerly.

Marie pinched his ear and laughed:

“Getting jealous, are you, old boy? Well, you see, there are others who admire Rose beside yourself.”

“Yes, I see,” he replied, getting up carelessly, and moving to the door.

“You’re going to Rosalind?” she asked hopefully.

“Yes, I will not delay speaking to her any longer,” he replied, going out as he spoke, and getting a glass of wine to steady himself, for he owned to himself he was a little bit nervous, thinking uneasily.

“She’ll make no end of a scene, of course—maybe call me a cur and all that. The sooner it’s over, the better.”

Fortified with several glasses of wine, he wended his way to the library.

Rosalind was there, sure enough, exquisitely gowned in some soft green fabric, with loads of lace trimming, that was very becoming to her blond type and she reclined rather pensively in a large leather chair.

CHAPTER XX.

FATE WILLED OTHERWISE.

"Ah, Charley, it is you. I am so glad, for you were just now in my thoughts!" cried Rosalind, beaming up at him with a tender smile.

Charley throwing himself down carelessly into the opposite chair, returned lightly:

"Very complimentary, I am sure, for I fancied you were thinking of the other fellow."

She wrinkled her brows at him.

"The other fellow?"

"Yes, you know, Rosalind—the one who was so nice you would have accepted his proposal if you hadn't been engaged to me."

"So Marie told you that nonsense, Charley! Ha! ha! Of course it was only a jest!" laughed Rosalind, looking up at him with arch blue eyes, full of tenderness.

Charley Bonair did not return the fond glance, he looked at her with serious gravity, unmoved by all her coquettish beauty and rich attire. He answered frankly:

"I am sorry to hear that it was a jest. I hoped it was truth."

"Charley!"

"Yes, I hoped it was true," he reiterated gravely, "because I came in here to tell you it was not too late to call him back."

"Oh, Charley!" reproachfully.

"Honor bright," he answered, still without smiling, and adding nervously, "oh, Rosalind, can't you see that he would be a better match for you than I, because he loves you, while I—I, in spite of myself, have

grown cold, careless, indifferent to you!"

"Cruel! Cruel!" sobbed the girl, behind her jeweled fingers.

"Yes, I know it, dear, but I cannot help it. I tried to be true to you, but fate willed otherwise, and I've struggled too long! I give it up for useless now. Despise me if you will, I deserve it, I know, and I don't blame you. But, Rosalind, if you held me to my promise I couldn't make you happy. I should hate you, instead of loving you. There, the bitter truth is out! Will you set me free?"

"It might not be as easy for me as for you, Charley. I am not so fickle-minded, perhaps, but I suppose I have a right to ask you one question!"

"Oh, yes, go on," he said.

"It is only this, Charley, dear: Has your heart only wandered from me, or is there—some one else?"

His handsome face flushed a little under her sorrowful glances, but he answered bravely:

"Forgive me for hurting you, Rosalind, but I will not deceive. Yes, you have guessed the truth. There is some one else!"

Rosalind sighed heavily:

"It is worse than I thought. Indifference might be cured if I had no rival, but this is hopeless. Oh, Charley, who is she, the girl who has won your love from me? Her name?"

"Rosalind, I would rather not tell you yet."

"That is unfair to me, Charley, very unfair!" bitterly. "Surely I have a deep interest in my successful rival. Does she love you?"

"I hope so."

"Then you have not asked her yet?"

"I waited for my release from you."

"Oh, then, you will ask her now, at once! Is she near at hand, Charley, or

perhaps I should say, Mr. Bonair, now?"

"Call me Charley always if you will, and let us be true friends, my dear girl, instead of lovers," he pleaded, with outstretched hands.

Rosalind placed her cold little hand eagerly in his, and answered:

"This is very sudden, and very hard on me, Charley, because I have loved you dearly for a year, and looked forward with joy to a life spent by your side. Before I promise to release you, grant me one favor."

"Name it, Rosalind."

"You have not asked your new love yet, and you are not sure she will love you in return?"

"I am reasonably sure," he said, with the confidence of a sanguine mind.

"How long will it be before you can have your answer?"

"A week—perhaps two," he replied, suddenly remembering that Berry was yet precariously ill.

"Then this is what I ask you, Charley, dear—yes, still dear, despite the wound in my heart. Keep our secret until you have your new love's acceptance of your suit. Let us remain to the world lovers still, until you are plighted to another. Then I will release you from your vow."

"It shall be as you say," he answered, so grateful for her promise of release, that he did not think it mattered going on with the farce of an engagement a while longer.

"If it will make it any less painful for you, Rose, you can say you jilted me, you know. I shouldn't mind at all!"

"Thank you—I will think it over," she answered dejectedly, and the last glimpse he had of her was just as she hid her face in her hands again and sat silent, like a statue of despair.

He went immediately down to the keeper's cottage, as he did every day, for news of Berry, and his heart leaped with joy when Mrs. Cline told him there was a marked change for the better, and the invalid had

begun to take notice and to try to talk a little.

“When the doctor came this morning he was so pleased with the improvement, he said she was quite sure to get well now,” she said.

“Thank Heaven!” he cried fervently, and after a momentary hesitation, he added earnestly:

“Mrs. Cline, do me one favor, and I will never forget it. If that fellow, Weston, comes to see her again, do not admit him to see the patient. Tell him she is improving, but can see no one.”

“I’ll do as you say, sir, but Lor’ bless you, some of them actor folks comes here every day to ask about her.”

“But remember, I wish to be the first one admitted to her presence when she is able to see any one,” he replied.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HAPPY MEETING.

But April had succeeded March before Berry was fairly convalescent.

A long and weary month she had lain upon that bed of pain before life struggled back for certain into her weary, battered frame, and the light of memory shone again in her big, pathetic brown eyes.

Then she began to get well very fast, and to betray a great curiosity over everything, asking questions that the doctor said might be freely answered.

So before she was permitted to see any one but her nurses, she knew all there was to tell—that Charley Bonair, the millionaire senator's only son, had rescued her from Bruin's clutches at the peril of his own life, and that the mysterious assailant had put a ball in his shoulder as he bent over her in the pit.

"Do not tell me he was killed," sobbed Berry.

Mrs. Cline laughed reassuringly.

"Not a bit of it, my dear young lady, although Heaven only knows what might have happened only for Sam and me coming up just then and scaring off the vile woman that sought your death, for she might have shot again and again. But we chased her away, and opened the door of the pit, and found the bears in an awful uproar, and there's no telling what might have happened next, only that we got you both out as quick as possible and brought you to our house. Laws, Mr. Bonair only had a bullet in his shoulder, and the doctor soon got it out, but he stayed here two weeks, afraid to be moved home, and even now he comes down every day to ask after you, always bringing fresh flowers to decorate your room. A mighty good heart has Mr. Charley."

Berry lay gazing at the fragrant flowers on the table, a dreamy light in her great brown eyes, a faint flush staining her pallid cheeks.

She was thinking how strange and sad it was that their paths had crossed again so tragically—hers and handsome, wicked Charley Bonair's.

She called him wicked, because she remembered vividly the night of their moonlight ride, when he had asked her for her heart without her hand—oh, the shame of it—promising she should be his sweetheart even if he married Rosalind! Back over Berry's mind, in a flood tide of grief, rushed the memory of his burning kiss, and her wild words when she had flung his roses back into his face, wounding him with their thorns, then leaped in a passion of wounded love and pride out of the trap into the road, where, striking her head on a rock, she had become unconscious for hours.

When she had yielded to the persuasions of the theatrical people to become one of themselves, she had done it with the resolve to place the whole width of the world, if possible, between herself and Charley Bonair, praying never to see his face again.

Now the work of almost a year was undone by the cruelest chance in the world.

Alas, what strange fate had sent her unconsciously to his home, beneath his very roof, when the cruel wound had seared over, and she was learning to forget!

It was the very irony of fate that she should owe her life to him, to Charley Bonair, the proud, handsome profligate!

"Oh," she cried to herself, in bitterness of soul, "I had rather have perished than owed my life to him!" And suddenly she burst into the most piteous sobbing Mrs. Cline had ever heard. It was just as though her poor heart were broken, thought the sympathetic soul.

"Ah, dear, dear, what a fool I was, blabbing out everything at once! Now you will get worse for the excitement, and I shall be to blame!" she cried out piteously.

"No, no, I—I—will be calm!" cried Berry, subduing her sobs by a violent effort, as she put out her hand, so frail and white.

“I am better now; I will not give way again. Tell me more.”

“Not to-day, miss—not till I see that my gabbling has no ill effect on you,” Mrs. Cline replied uneasily. But just then there was a light tap on the door that opened into the hall, and when she went to it, there was Bonair, asking anxiously:

“How is our little patient to-day, Mrs. Cline?”

How the musical voice thrilled Berry’s heart, stirring it to subtle rapture! Alas, she did not hate him, after all; she was turning faint and dizzy just with the happiness of hearing him speak again! His faintest whisper made her heart rejoice!

The voice ceased, and she heard Mrs. Cline saying:

“She is getting better fast, sir, but I fear I have talked to her too much to-day, telling her about the night you rescued her, and just now she had a hard fit of crying from excitement.”

“Oh, hush!” cried out Berry imploringly, but the sound of her voice went to his heart, made him reckless; he pushed past Mrs. Cline into the room, crying:

“Oh, let me have just one peep at her, please!”

Mrs. Cline, dazed and undecided, shut the door and stood with her back against it, staring as Charley Bonair dropped down on his knees, fixing adoring eyes on the sick girl’s pallid, frightened face.

“Don’t be angry, little love! My own sweetheart, found once more, and never to be lost again! For I am free now, darling, and I will marry you to-morrow if you will have me for your husband!”

CHAPTER XXII.

THEIR PLIGHTED VOWS.

It was enough to blow out the faint spark of Berry's life, the sudden shock of seeing her lover, and hearing those startling words from his lips, but, happily, "joy never kills."

Now at the sight of his handsome face that she had never expected to see again in life, above all at the sound of his musical voice, uttering words she had not dared to fancy on his lips, such a wave of rapturous emotion thrilled Berry from head to foot, that she could not utter a sound. Her only response to her lover's ardent words was a sudden rain of blissful tears that relieved the tension of her surcharged heart.

With his own soft handkerchief Charley Bonair wiped away those shining drops, murmuring fond words, quite heedless of the gaping Mrs. Cline, who looked and listened, thinking to herself:

"Well, I never! Has the man gone clean daft, promising to marry this poor little actress, when the folks up at the mansion say that he's engaged to that grand, rich New York heiress, Miss Montague!"

As she had known him from his boyhood, and did not stand at all in awe of him, she cried, in righteous indignation:

"For shame, Mr. Charley, trying to flirt with that poor little sick girl, that don't know you as well as I do, or she would not listen to your foolishness! Get out of here, now, do, before you scare my patient into fits!"

At this the happy young fellow, remembering her presence for the first time, got up deliberately from his knees, where he was kneeling by Berry, and marching to Mrs. Cline, took her, playfully, by the shoulders, and put her outside the door, saying gayly:

"You don't understand a word of this, of course, but I will explain it all to your satisfaction if you will stay out here till I get an answer to my

proposal, will you?" pleadingly.

"I—I—yes, I suppose I must, if you order me to, Mr. Charley, but I don't know what the doctor, and the nurse, and Miss Montague, too, will say to all this goings on, sir, especially if the poor young girl gets a relapse from excitement," she complained.

"She will not get a relapse. Happiness never killed anybody!" cried the young man, beaming happily upon her, as he shut her outside, and went back to the blushing, trembling little girl.

"My darling, please forgive me for taking you by storm this way, but I never had any patience in my life, and how could I have now, when I have the sweetest story in the world to tell you? Listen, Berry, my dearest: I have loved you and you alone, since the first moment I saw your lovely face shining down on me from the cottage window framed in morning-glory vines. From that moment your face has been the star of my life's horizon, and your sweet love song has haunted many a dream. But I was betrothed to another, a proud, rich girl, my equal in birth and position, so at first I did not think of breaking my vow. Then you faded from my life, and I feared you were dead until I saw you on the boards of the theater that night, in my own home, a very queen of love and beauty. I knew you again in a moment. My little Berry could not hide from me under the pseudonym of Vera Vane."

Berry's soft cheeks dimpled into a smile at that, and taking her small hand, he held it tightly clasped in a warm, sweet pressure, while he continued:

"That very night I had come home from a long yachting trip, trying to forget you, and had made up my mind to settle down and make everybody but myself happy by marrying Rosalind. But my presence was as yet unknown to my people, and when I saw you again, Berry, and knew that you lived, more sweet and lovely than ever, I could not bear the thought of my betrothed. I stole away when the play was over and went out into the grounds to brood over my trouble. While I smoked a cigar, hidden on a seat in some shrubberies, you came by and stopped and talked to yourself until the old fortune teller came to upbraid you for not keeping your engagement promptly. Do you remember it,

Berry?"

"Ah, yes, yes—and you were there close by?" she breathed, in wonder.

"Yes, almost close enough to touch you: I was tempted, indeed, to rush to you and clasp you to my heart, but I had not forgotten the night I kissed you when you flung my roses in my face and scratched me with the sharp thorns; I did not care to risk such vixenish resentment again, although that kiss, believe me, was worth all I suffered for it."

She listened, eagerly, to every word, flushing and paling, delicately as a rose, her large, dilated brown eyes drinking in every tender word. Charley Bonair thought, in spite of her thinness, that she was as lovely as a dream. Suffering had only refined her beauty.

She had scarcely a word to say; she only listened, drinking in his voice like heavenly music, and he, gazing at her and stroking her little hand, went on with his explanations, saying:

"I heard all you and the old woman were saying, and was vastly amazed at your credulity in believing her silly yarns. Well, soon after you left, I started down to see Zilla, and heard your cries of terror, so by hurrying my pace I was able to get there in time to save you from being quite killed by the angry brute. I suppose Mrs. Cline has told you everything that happened afterward, as far as she knew."

She murmured yes, and he added joyously:

"What she did not know, was that as soon as I found out you would live, I resolved to break my engagement with Rosalind, if you would forgive the past and have me. I have carried out my intentions, and am free to offer you my heart and my name. Can you love me, little girl, in spite of my glaring faults, and take me in hand to reform me?"

His tender eyes shone love into hers, and he looked as though he meditated kissing her at any moment. Berry felt dizzy all at once, with a strange feeling, as if she were floating in air on rosy clouds of bliss.

"Oh, Berry, why don't you speak? Are you angry with me still? Will you not forgive and love me?" cried her ardent lover, with dawning anxiety, for he felt her little hand growing chill and fluttering like a bird in his

clasp.

She half sobbed:

“Oh, oh, I am almost afraid!”

“Afraid, my darling—of what, pray?”

“To—marry—you, Mr. Bonair! Because you are all so rich and grand—your people, you know, and they might not care for you to marry simple little me, instead of the proud heiress, Rosalind!” she panted questioningly, while blushes came and went deliciously on her thin cheeks.

Charley Bonair looked sober for a moment, then laughed again.

“Ah! now I am up against the real thing!” he exclaimed. “It is quite true, Berry, darling, that they may object a little at first, but when they see how sweet and charming you are, dad and my pretty sisters will surely come around and love you almost as well as I do. Of course they would make no end of a bother if I asked their leave first, but I don’t mean to do it, you see! We’ll get married first, my angel, and announce it afterward. I can take the Clines into the secret, and we could be married here to-morrow, in this room, if you will consent, Berry.”

“Oh, I am afraid, afraid!” she moaned nervously.

“Listen to me, Berry. Are you afraid that dad will cut us off with a shilling if I marry you? Do you object to being a poor man’s bride?” her lover demanded, rather sternly, in his impatience.

“Oh, no, no! Mr. Bonair—I——”

“Call me, Charley,” he interrupted imploringly.

“Charley, then! I’ve always been poor, you know, and I shouldn’t mind it all with you, dear, if—if—you are sure you will never repent and be sorry I married you.”

“You will marry me, then, darling?” He bent and took the kiss he was longing for. “Bless you, dear, your Charley will never repent he won such a prize! It may be you that will be sorry, for I have got a hard name,

you know, and need reforming," he said truthfully.

"I will love you so, my Charley, it will make a better man of you!" she cried tenderly, giving way to the rapture of her happy love at last. Then, as a light tap sounded on the door: "Oh, dear, we were quite forgetting poor Mrs. Cline, dearest. Do let her in, and explain everything, or she will think this interview very improper."

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALL FOR LOVE.

Charley Bonair was a man of action.

Having resolved to marry Berenice Vining, he knew that he would have to encounter strong family opposition, and foreboded that every possible means would be adopted to prevent the marriage.

Therefore he decided to forestall family interference by marrying the young girl first, and trying to reconcile his relatives afterward.

His sanguine disposition made him believe that this would be an easy task. And even if it failed he felt quite independent, even in the face of possible disinheritance.

His dead mother had left her own handsome fortune to be divided between her three children on the coming of age of Marie, the youngest.

Charley thought he and his love could get along very well on his portion, especially as Berenice was used to poverty and would not really know how to be extravagant.

He made up his mind to have the ceremony quietly to-morrow and he would then feel surer.

He took Mrs. Cline partially into his confidence, telling her that he and Berenice had been lovers before and parted through a misunderstanding that he had now explained away.

The next thing he had to do—the hardest of all—was to acquaint Rosalind with the fact of his acceptance by her rival.

He felt keenly how unwelcome the news must be to the girl who had loved him and hoped to be his bride, but he assured himself that she would soon be consoled by the attentions of other lovers.

“I am not much of a prize for any girl, if it were not for father’s money,

anyway. She will soon forget me," he thought, with unwonted seriousness, for at the thought of wedding little Berry, all the follies of his youth rose up blackly before his mind's eye, with a poignant sense of regret.

As he strolled slowly backward to the mansion, in the late afternoon amid the sweet sights and sounds and perfume of spring at her loveliest, he caught himself wondering "if the old man would 'cut up very rough' over the mésalliance he was going to make," and if his dainty sisters would turn up their pretty noses at his humble bride.

"It is very likely they may, but if so I must face the music and accept my fate. One thing is certain. I would not give up my bonnie bride for the whole Bonair fortune, although I should like a generous slice of it for my bride's sake as well as my own. Heigh-ho, he may cut me off with a shilling, though, and then I shall only get the modest portion from my mother. Without that we should have to live on bread and cheese and kisses, my love and I." He threw back his handsome head with a happy laugh, and went his way, whistling a plaintive Irish air that seemed to chime with his mood:

> "My fortunes are not what for your sake I could wish them to be;
> My wealth consists of but a heart that beats alone for thee;
> And when I ask you to be mine,
> As I shall surely do,
> This is the song I shall sing to you:
>
> "My heart for your heart
> Is all I can give;
> My love for your love
> As long as we live;
> My smile for your smile,
> Until life is o'er;
> These give me, sweetheart,
> I ask nothing more."

With a heart elate with love and joy and triumph, he entered the house and sought Rosalind, but she was nowhere to be seen.

He sent up a servant to her room to ask for an interview, eager to have

the painful task over that he might give himself up wholly to the happiness that sent his pulses bounding joyously along his veins.

The servant came back quickly to say that Miss Montague was in bed with a sick headache, and had desired not to be disturbed.

With that he began to feel a little remorseful, saying to himself:

“Poor Rose! no doubt she has wept herself into a headache over losing me. I wish she had not loved so well! It makes me feel badly because I know I don’t deserve one of her tears.”

He was interrupted here by a visit from the detective who came, as he had done several times before, to report that he had made no headway with the case.

“The old Indian seeress has covered up her tracks completely. I cannot get the slightest clew to her whereabouts or her identity, and I almost believe that some disguised person played the part of fortune teller, and may be laughing in secret at our fruitless search,” he exclaimed.

While the young man stared at him in startled wonder, he added:

“I have made up my mind that we can do nothing more until Miss Vane, the actress, is able to speak for herself. Doubtless she might tell us something that would furnish a clew. What do you think?”

“It may be so, but I doubt it. She is fast regaining strength, and I hope may soon be interviewed on the subject, although the physician interdicts such conversation now,” Charley answered.

“In that case I will wait before I take any further steps. If she cannot furnish any further clew it will be useless for me to go on, as the murderer or murderess, as the case may be, is securely entrenched behind a disguise we cannot penetrate,” reluctantly owned the detective.

Charley Bonair, after a moment’s meditation, agreed with him that it must be so.

“One more question,” said the baffled sleuth: “Do you know of any malignant enemy Miss Vane can have?”

In his masculine obtuseness, Charley quickly answered:

“No, I do not know that she has an enemy in the world.”

The detective mused a moment, then exclaimed:

“Sometimes love can be as cruel as hate. I wonder if the beautiful young girl had a rejected lover?”

He started when he was answered in the affirmative.

“Ah, perhaps I am getting on the right track now! Where is this man? Who is he?”

“He is the manager of the company in which Miss Vane was the leading lady. His name is Willis Weston, and he may be seen every night on the boards of the Olympia Theater.”

“Ah-h, then I have seen him already! A clever actor and a handsome man, on or off the stage. Perhaps this may give me a clew. I shall look into his past, and in the meantime, sir, as soon as the young lady can safely give me an interview, please let me know, for surely she may be able to throw some light on the darkness of this mysterious case.”

He bowed himself out, and Charley was about to leave the room also when he was startled by the appearance of Miss Montague’s maid, Suzette. She curtsied, and said:

“My mistress begins to feel a little better, sir, and would be pleased to see you for a while in her boudoir.”

“I will come at once,” he replied, following the maid in his eagerness to be off with the old love, but saying to himself humorously:

“What fools men are, anyway! They would be lots better off if they left the women alone and remained bachelors all their lives, but instead of that they must always be getting into hot water over the pretty dears. We are weak as children, where woman is concerned, that’s the truth. Now, I wonder what is up with Rosalind? I pray Heaven she does not treat me to a fit of hysterics.”

Suzette opened a door into a shaded rose-hung boudoir, and

disappeared.

He stepped across the threshold and was alone with Rosalind.

The slighted beauty lay gracefully posing among the silken pillows of an Oriental couch.

She wore a negligee robe of soft white lansdowne, embroidered in blue flowers that matched the striking hue of her beautiful eyes. The golden lengths of her thick hair flowed unconfined over her shoulders, and her face, even to her lips, wore a bluish pallor of illness and suffering.

At Charley's entrance a melancholy smile curved her lips, and she extended her white hand, glittering with diamonds, murmuring:

"Dear Charley, I was really too ill to receive you. See to what a plight your falsity has brought me. But I hoped against hope you had relented, and wished everything to be as before, so I sent for you. Ah, tell me, dear, is it true?"

Charley's heart quickly sank like a stone in his breast, for he saw that his presentiment was right; hysterics were impending, sure enough!

He felt like swearing, but he controlled the impulse and stood gazing at her, speechlessly, while she raved on:

"Oh, Charley, dearest, I've thought it all over until my brain is almost wild, and I've decided that I cannot, will not give you up to my rival! I have the first, best claim, and I will yield it to no other. Ah, say that you will love me still, that you will be true to your vows!"

"Here is a pretty pickle!" groaned the young man to himself, in a sort of consternation at the situation, his generous heart touched by her display of emotion, for her beauty and her sorrow were very striking, almost theatrical.

But he pulled himself together, and said gently, with an abashed air in his self-reproach:

"Don't say another word, please, Rosalind; you are only making matters worse. It is too late!"

“Too late!” she almost shrieked, and he answered seriously:

“Yes, forever, too late. I’ve proposed to the other girl, and have been accepted.”

A cry of rage burst from Rosalind’s lips, and her blue eyes blazed with the fire of jealous hate.

She sat erect suddenly and shook her small, jeweled fist close to his face.

“Coward! Traitor! You have turned my love to hate, and you shall pay dear for the slight you have put upon me!”

“Do you threaten me with a suit for breach of promise?” he demanded laughingly.

“Worse than that, far worse!” she answered fiercely, adding: “I know who my secret rival is already—that miserable little actress that used to be Berry Vining, and I will have my revenge on you both! Now go!”

Charley obeyed her with alacrity!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NEXT DAY.

Miss Montague's headache lasted till the afternoon of the next day, and she denied herself to every one but her maid, keeping quiet, as she said, to overcome the attack, but in reality plotting schemes for revenge on her successful rival.

Her seclusion ended, she appeared at luncheon, exquisitely gowned, and with a becoming pallor that witnessed her recent sufferings.

But all the ladies at the table were pale, for that matter, and they had pink eyelids, as if from recent weeping, while in their demeanor to Rosalind was mingled overweening pity and sympathetic tenderness for her illness.

So she condescended graciously:

"Don't let's talk of it any more. I'm better now."

But it seemed to her, presently, that there was something else in the air, and, glancing at a vacant chair, she exclaimed:

"Why doesn't Charley come to luncheon? Is he sick? Is that why all of you look so tearful?"

With that one of the girls choked back a sob and answered bitterly:

"He isn't sick, oh, no; much worse! He has gone crazy!"

"Hush, dearie!" admonished Madam Fortescue, glancing significantly at the servant in waiting, while she added, to Rosalind, kindly and with dignity:

"The news of Charley's escapade will keep till we have finished luncheon."

After that no one had much appetite, and the four soon adjourned to a private room where Rosalind said brusquely:

“If there’s anything to tell, let me hear it quickly—I never could bear suspense.”

As they hesitated, with great eyes of sorrow and sympathy, she continued:

“Why do you all look at me so strangely and pityingly? Has Charley done something very bad indeed?”

“He has gone crazy!” again answered Marie angrily, mopping her wet eyes with her lace handkerchief.

“It will break your heart!” sobbed Lucile, adding:

“Dear Rosalind, please do not be angry with us when you hear it. We are not to blame, and we will love you all the more for the grief he has caused you.”

“My dear girls, you will drive poor Rosalind wild. Let me tell her the cruel truth at once,” exclaimed Madam Fortescue, and taking the girl’s hand, tenderly, in hers, she said tearfully:

“I grieve to tell you that my nephew, Charley Bonair, has to-day capped the climax of his follies by making a clandestine marriage with the sick actress whom he saved from the bear pit the night of the ball.”

“Oh, heavens!” gasped Rosalind, in very genuine horror and indignation, for she had not expected the climax so soon.

She sat gazing at the speaker with a pale, stricken face, while she went on bitterly:

“It seems Charley had known the girl before that night. He met her first in the town where you live before she went upon the stage, and fell in love with her then, so he says. But she had some sort of a strange disappearance, then, and he believed her dead until coming home, unexpectedly, the night of our grand ball, he saw her on the stage and knew her at once for the missing girl. He was so agitated between his duty to you and his love for her that he did not make his presence known to us, but went out into the grounds to overcome his agitation. There he had the good fortune, as he calls it, of saving her life. The

romance of this incident increased his love to recklessness so that he threw pride and duty to the winds and proposed to the girl yesterday. She accepted the offer, and this morning he procured a minister, and they were married, with the Clines as witnesses."

Lucile chimed in furiously:

"He had the impudence to come and tell us all about it when the thing was irrevocably done, and to beg us to accept that nobody for a sister!"

Rosalind would never be paler than now, as she sat and listened, speechless with rage, at Charley's escapade.

Where were all the clever plans she had made for circumventing him now? All shattered to pieces by this action of the ardent lover, who had cleverly forestalled everything by his hasty wedding.

"We will never accept her for a sister—never! We will never forgive him for the slight to you whom we loved already as a sister!" sobbed Marie, and at this juncture Rosalind thought it was time to fall back, half fainting, in her seat, but not to go entirely unconscious until she had heard all there was to tell.

They ran to chafe her face and hands and to drop tender little kisses on her brow, until she seemed to revive, and murmured faintly:

"I am better now. Go on, tell me everything."

"Of course, we overwhelmed him with bitter reproaches," declared Marie, "and we told him we wanted nothing more to do with him, or with the low nobody he has married."

"And he said—what?" demanded Rosalind.

"He pleaded for her at first, and then when he saw we were not to be placated, he grew angry, too, and left the house, saying he would rather have his little bride's love than ours. So as soon as he left we telegraphed father, in Washington, to come home at once and see if he could do anything to break up the match, for Charley had suddenly lost his mind and married a low actress that we could never receive in the family, to say nothing of the slight he had put upon you!"

“Cruel! cruel! Oh, my heart will break! I can never hold up my head again for very shame; me, Rosalind Montague, to be jilted for a creature like that—the daughter of the New Market tailoress, a woman that worked by the day in a shop!” groaned Rosalind hysterically.

“Then you know the girl?” asked Madam Fortescue.

“Yes, she grew up in abject poverty there in New Market. Her father drove a delivery wagon—till he died—for the tailor his wife sewed for, and there were a host of children, and this girl, the youngest, who grew up idle and rather pretty so that she cared for nothing but flirting and flaunting about, never soiling her hands with honest work. I knew that Charley flirted with her a little, but mamma advised me not to find fault with him, saying it wouldn’t amount to anything. Soon after she disappeared from the town and I never saw her again until that night of the play. I was almost sure that Vera Vane was little frisky, flirting Berry Vining, the little schemer, that has cut me out of my lover!”

They hastened to caress her again, assuring her of their warm sympathy, and adding their unalterable determination never to accept the scheming little actress for a sister. Charley could never be their brother again, either; they would punish him by treating him as a stranger.

“If he had told you that he loved her best and wanted his freedom, it would not have seemed quite so wicked, but when he told us he had done so, we did not believe him, as you would have told us if such were the case,” added Mrs. Fortescue.

“Oh, how could he be totally false? He has never breathed one word of all this to me. If he had I should have freely confided in all of you. You know I have made no secret of my troubles,” sighed Rosalind.

“Only wait till papa comes and he will find a way, I’m sure, to break the marriage and bring poor Charley back to his senses,” declared Marie, between tears and anger.

CHAPTER XXV.

A FAIR BRIDE.

Charley Bonair had indeed gone away from his sisters in an angry mood, stung by their reproaches and embittered by their sharp abuse of his wife, the scheming nobody, as they did not scruple to call her to his face.

He also, in the fullness of his happiness, had sent off a telegram to his father before he had carried his news up to Bonair, and it ran very simply:

"Rosalind and I broke off recently, and I have to-day married another girl who has the truest heart and fairest face in the world, so that I confidently hope for your forgiveness and your blessing."

Charley thought this was a masterly stroke, the prompt confession of his mésalliance, and hoped much from it, little dreaming of the malicious message that followed it from his sisters, entreating Senator Bonair to return home and do something or other to Charley in punishment for the disgrace he had brought on the family, marrying a scheming little actress, an out-and-out nobody, and jilting his beautiful promised bride.

In their anger, the sisters did not care to recall the praises they had bestowed on Berry for her beauty and her clever acting, nor the pity they had felt for her after the accident that so nearly ended her life. Her unparalleled impudence in marrying Charley because he asked her and because she loved him blotted out everything else in her favor.

But Charley, returning to the cottage, basked in the smiles of his charming bride, and resolutely put dull care behind him.

It is wonderful what miracles love can work in a day!

Berenice, who had been convalescing slowly and listlessly because her sad heart took but little interest in life, had changed in a night and day

to a lovely, hopeful creature whose brown eyes glowed with love and joy, while her thin cheeks had put on the roses of nature under Charley's fond, eager glance, that was to her like the sun shining upon a flower, unfolding it to glorious bloom.

The happy excitement had loaned her such fictitious strength that the nurse had permitted her to sit up in a chair for the wedding, and Mrs. Cline had gone to a shop and bought for her a simple white robe with white laces and ribbons to make it look bridelike.

Thus attired, and with her little hand in Charley's she had murmured timidly, after the minister, the sweet words of the service that made her the sweetest and happiest of brides.

When it was all over they had all gone out quietly and left them alone for a blissful half hour.

Charley knelt down by his bonnie bride and clasped her to his heart.

"My queen!" he murmured, kissing her hands, her face and hair in an ecstasy of triumphant love.

She drooped against his breast, very tired, but very happy.

"Oh, I do not know how to realize my bliss!" she murmured. "I am really your wife, Charley, your own wife, and you are my husband! Ah, it does not seem possible! I loved you in vain so long, I almost fear I am dreaming."

"It is no dream, but the sweetest reality in the world—to me!" he cried ardently, stopping the words on her lips with kisses. And so they went on, until Mrs. Cline returned and said:

"Now, my dear sir, you must go out and leave your lady to rest. She has stayed up too long already."

Charley obeyed reluctantly, and beckoning her to the door, said, in a whisper:

"You will have to prepare a room for me down here, Mrs. Cline, for I am determined to stay and nurse my lovely bride back to health."

“That can be quickly done, sir. Her improvement is miraculous already, and will, no doubt, continue with due care. As to a room, I can make you comfortable, no doubt, but you will miss the grandeur of Bonair,” the woman answered, with a curtsey.

Charley answered, with a laugh:

“I may have to miss those grandeurs always, henceforward, Mrs. Cline, for if my father should be as angry as my sisters are he will probably disinherit me.”

“Ah, no fear of that I think, sir, and you his only son, the apple of his eye, as it were. And, dear me, sir, if he should be angry at you, why, what would he be at me and Sam for aiding and abetting your marriage? He would very likely turn us out of this place!” cried the woman uneasily, for her many years at Bonair had endeared the place to her heart.

“If he does I will find you another place as good, so don’t begin to worry yet. Let us look on the bright side as long as we can!” cried sanguine Charley.

And from that moment he began to live up to his creed, never uttering a word of apprehension as to the outcome of his marriage.

He had followed up his telegram to his father with a long explanatory letter in which he did full justice to the charms of his bride; but to neither one came any reply, although up at Bonair the sisters had received a speedy answer that read briefly:

“I am horrified, but do not see anything that I can do. Will leave at once in special car for home.”

So up at Bonair, as the days slipped away, they began to expect the master, but they kept it secret from Charley, whom they scornfully said was keeping up his dignity down yonder in his fool’s paradise.

In fact, Charley did not go near them again.

He had a sense of bitter outrage in the cavalier treatment they had accorded him, and kept away from Bonair trying to forget them in the new and delightful role of benedict.

In the meantime, the news had got into the daily papers and created its due sensation.

Reporters flocked to the keeper's cottage, and Charley submitted to interviews for the sake of setting his bride right with the public. Meager details of the romance were given out and created considerable sensation; but the still delicate bride saw no one as yet, although the members of her company called in a body, headed by Mr. Weston, to offer congratulations.

Charley entertained them cordially, excusing Berenice on the score of her weakness, and, saying he hoped she would soon get strong enough to go away with him on their honeymoon trip. He added genially, that she could never tread the boards again. She must content herself with entertaining her husband.

He took pains to show great friendliness for Mr. Weston at whose secret pain he very easily guessed, and his cordiality won him a true friend whose worth was latterly to be well proved.

So the days slipped away, and Berry would never forget that morning when she first sat up for the day in a pretty house gown of rosy pink cashmere, cascaded in lace, that Charley himself had gone shopping to buy for his darling. She glanced up as Charley entered, and at sight of his eager face, exclaimed:

"What has happened, dearest, that you look so excited?"

He clasped her to his heart, covering the sweet face with ardent kisses till she laughingly cried for mercy.

Then he gave her the great bunch of pink roses he had brought, and explained:

"I have great news, my darling girl. I have just heard that father arrived home unexpectedly last evening, and although it seems strange and rather discouraging that he has not sent word down to me, still I shall do my duty by going up to call on him, and if he has forgiven me I shall bring him down to call on his new daughter. If he should be angry I will soon return alone!" And with a stifled sigh of keen anxiety, he embraced

his trembling bride and hurried away.

Left alone, she threw herself down nervously to rest on her couch, quite frightened at the idea of meeting the great, rich senator, her husband's father.

She need not have been so nervous and uneasy had she but known.

Hours slipped away, and Charley did not return, and her suspense grew almost unbearable.

Mrs. Cline came in at last with such a pale, indignant face that the nervous young bride nearly fainted with dread.

"Something dreadful must have happened to make you look so strange," she cried uneasily, adding: "I fear you have had bad news for me."

Her heart nearly stopped its beating when Mrs. Cline answered angrily:

"Bad! I should say so, but try to hear it the best you can, dear young lady, for that high and mighty man, your husband's father, has had Mr. Charley arrested and clapped in jail on a charge of insanity!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

BRIBING A BRIDE.

Mrs. Cline's startling announcement was like a bolt of lightning falling from a clear sky.

The young bride uttered one horrified cry, then fell back in her chair, half fainting, her big, frightened brown eyes staring wildly at Mrs. Cline, who, in a very tempest of excitement, continued to rage.

"Never heard of such high-handed villainy in my life, never! No wonder you look so white and scared, my dear young lady! Here, drink this wine to nerve you while I tell you the rest."

She pressed the glass to Berry's lips and forced her to swallow a few mouthfuls, then began again:

"Try to bear it the best you can, for it can't be kept from you, all this bad news, and you must keep your wits about you to plan something to do for your husband. Yes, cry all you want to, it'll relieve your heart; and this outrage is enough to make the very angels weep! The servants at Bonair tell a terrible tale about the fuss between the father and son! They say there was an awful scene between them when Mr. Charley went in this morning. The senator was in a tearing-down rage, and would not listen to a word of excuse for his marriage, but cursed and abused him, and finally turned him out of doors, disinherited. And the worst of it was that he had already caused a warrant to be got, arresting him for insanity, and the officers took him just as he was leaving his father's house, all broke up with sorrow and despair."

"Ah, Heaven! my poor husband!" moaned Berenice, heartbroken and bewildered.

"Wasn't it an outrage!" cried the woman indignantly. "And to climax the meanness, Mrs. Bonair, what else do you think that heartless old hunks of a senator did? He got mad at my husband for letting the wedding be at our home, and has discharged him from his position at Bonair, and

ordered him to vacate this cottage as soon as he can pack up his goods."

"Oh, Heaven! that you should suffer for our fault. This is terrible. It were better I had perished in Zilla's clutches than to live and involve poor Charley and his friends in such misery!" sobbed Berry.

"Don't look at it that way, dear young lady," condoled Mrs. Cline, who, having now blurted out the whole story, became less excited and eager to soothe the distressed young bride, so she continued:

"Bless your heart, we can soon get another place—sooner, I expect, than the senator can suit himself to another man. And we aren't penniless, either. We have a tidy bit of savings put by, besides the nice gift of money, so don't worry over that! The thing is to get Mr. Charley out of jail as soon as possible."

"But, oh, how shall we do it? It is cruel, cruel to have placed him there! We know well he is not insane!" wept Berry.

"Of course he is not," agreed the woman; "and my husband says a lawyer must be got at once and set to work to get him out of that as soon as possible."

"Hark! the doorbell!" cried Berry, and Mrs. Cline went to obey the summons.

She returned quickly with an official-looking letter.

"It is for you—brought down by one of Senator Bonair's servants, who will wait for the answer," she said, in high excitement.

The startled bride took the aggressive-looking envelope, with fingers that shook as she tore it open.

Her eyes were so blurred by tears she could scarcely read, but presently it all came to her that Senator Bonair was making her a cold business proposition to consent to a prompt divorce from his son upon the payment of a handsome sum of money.

The tears rushed to her eyes—tears of burning indignation—and her heart beat suffocatingly.

“What does the old villain want of you, if I may ask?” queried the curious Mrs. Cline.

Berry handed her the letter to read, saying bitterly:

“He wishes to bribe me—Charley’s bride of a week—to consent to a divorce.”

“The mean old tyrant! He ought to be hung!” ejaculated the woman, as her eyes devoured the curt note. She handed it back, and asked:

“What shall you say to this insult, dearie?”

“Only give me a pen and I will show you!” cried Berenice, her eyes flashing through their bitter tears. She seized it and wrote, in a nervous, trembling hand, across the back of the senator’s sheet:

“Those whom God has joined together, let not man put asunder!”

To these words the bride wrote her full name, in a large, aggressive hand:

“Berenice Vining Bonair.”

“I guess that will settle him for good!” laughed Mrs. Cline, as she handed Berry a fresh envelope to address to Senator Bonair.

This done, she carried the letter quickly to the waiting messenger, saying, with a proud toss of the head:

“There’s a letter for your master, and much good may it do him! There’s some folks whose principles he can’t buy with his yellow gold!”

She was turning to retrace her steps when she saw Mr. Weston coming up to the door with a pale, excited face.

“Ah, good morning!” he exclaimed courteously. “I hope the invalid—Mrs. Bonair—can see me this evening for a few minutes. I have just heard the shocking news about her husband, and came to see her to offer my services to do anything she wishes, providing, of course, she has no nearer friends she would prefer to act for her in the case.”

“Bless you, sir, I don’t think she knows anybody in San Francisco but us

two, and poor Sam is so upset with his discharge off the place, and moving orders at the same time, that I don't believe he hardly knows where he's at, sir; and it seems like Heaven must have sent you to my poor lady's relief!" cried Mrs. Cline, ushering him straight into Berry's presence without thinking it necessary to ask permission.

Berry was sobbing, bitterly, with her face in her hands, and she looked up with a start that made him say deprecatingly:

"Forgive this intrusion, but I came to see if I couldn't help you. I know the outrage your husband has suffered, and he will need a friend to look after his interests. Do you wish me to act as your friend in this matter?"

"Ah, this is very noble in you, Mr. Weston. A friend in need is a friend indeed. I accept your offer in the same spirit it is offered, and am most grateful," faltered Berry, giving him her hand which he pressed, cordially, then released, saying:

"Now I am very glad, indeed, that I came. Of course, this absurd charge cannot be proved against your husband, and the whole affair is spite work, still he may be imprisoned for days and kept in suspense when prompt action might procure speedy trial of his case and consequent freedom. Having your leave to represent you in this case, I shall engage a lawyer, who, with a writ of habeas corpus, can secure Mr. Bonair's immediate release and trial on the groundless charge."

"Oh, thank Heaven—and you!" cried the bride fervently. "Oh, then perhaps he need not, poor boy, spend the terrible night in prison!"

"That I cannot promise you certainly, but I will make all possible haste to restore him to you quickly. In order to do this I must be going. Farewell, and keep up a brave heart. This is only a temporary affliction; it will soon be over," he added cheerfully, bowing himself out, leaving Berry with a lighter heart, though her tears flowed fast.

"You are clean wore out with your troubles, poor soul!" cried Mrs. Cline. "Now you must lie down and rest a while, so as not to get sick again, won't you? For we shall have our hands full now, me a-packing up, and Sam a-looking out for a place to move to, see? But we shan't desert you, you poor lamb, nor Mr. Charley, either; for no matter where we go, you

can come with us, and he can, too, until he gets fixed for that honeymoon trip he's been planning this week! Though dear knows if he can afford it now, because he has only an allowance from his father, and I don't know if he has saved any of it or not! But there's money coming to him from his mother's estate before long, and that'll fix him up nicely, you see."

While she chattered on, Mrs. Cline got Berry to lie down on her little white couch for her much-needed rest, and then she went out to see to the packing up of her household goods, preparatory to giving up the cottage to another tenant.

Many tears fell as she moved about her work with the assistance of her yellow-faced Chinese boy of all work, for she had come here a bride, eighteen years ago, and fondly hoped to spend her life in the cottage with Sam. But fate had willed otherwise, and with a sad heart she prepared to go.

But not for all that did Mrs. Cline repent for one moment her kindness to Mr. Charley and his bonnie bride, although that had got her into trouble with the master and banishment from Bonair.

"I'd do the same thing over again, if I knew beforehand what was going to happen!" she vowed stoutly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FORGETTING THE WORLD.

The time is late summer on the bleak coast of Cornwall, a year and three months since the day when Charley Bonair walked out of the courtroom in San Francisco, cleared of the charge of insanity brought by his nearest and dearest relatives, and freed by the efforts of the man who had loved Berry so loyally that his friendship became her stay in the time of her sore need.

Grateful to those who had befriended him, embittered by persecution, Charley Bonair and his lovely bride had exiled themselves within a week after his acquittal on the charge of insanity. The young man still had some means left, and gathering everything together, he sailed for foreign shores with Berry, having first instructed a lawyer to attend to the rights of his inheritance from his mother when the property was divided, on his sister's coming of age.

That was long ago, and many things had transpired in that time.

To begin with, the disinherited son, never used to economy before, had recklessly spent the funds he had in hand, traveling expensively, showing Berry the wonders of the Old World, and answering to her timid remonstrances on his extravagance that he had plenty to last six months, and by then Marie would come of age and he would get his portion of five hundred thousand dollars from his mother.

And, oh, the days, the weeks, the months, how happily they had gone to the young pair of married lovers!

They had done the Continent leisurely at their own sweet will, they had wandered hither and thither with not a care save the silent grief of the young husband over the estrangement from his own people, and as to Berry, she had found out long ago, by a cablegram, that her mother was still living, not dead, as the vile fortune teller had falsely declared.

On getting this news the young husband had promptly sent his mother-

in-law a sum of money sufficient to keep her in ease and comfort a year, so that Berry's heart was at ease, and she gave herself up wholly to her happiness. They adored each other with a true devotion that never grew less. They were all in all to each other:

> A book of verses underneath the bough,
> A jug of wine, a loaf of bread, and thou
> Beside me singing in the wilderness,
> And wilderness were paradise enow!

Whatever the carping world might say of the millionaire senator's only son's mésalliance, to him it had been a salvation, turning him from evil courses to a purer, better life, making out of him the noble man nature had intended him to be.

His lovely bride grew more charming every day, to his enraptured eyes, and he bitterly regretted the pride that had prevented his family from seeing and knowing the girl whose flawless beauty and simple goodness must, if permitted the opportunity, have won its way to every heart.

He grew hot and angry when he remembered how bitterly they had railed against his darling, saying to himself that it was not like them to be so harsh and unforgiving, and it was surely Rosalind who had set them onto such cruelty, for she had threatened him with dire vengeance, and this was how she had kept her word. Once he had pitied Rosalind, but now he hated her for her malice that had cost him so dear.

He got another taste of it when the time rolled around for the division of his mother's fortune, for his lawyer wrote him that Senator Bonair, as sole trustee, refused to surrender his son's portion, still claiming he was insane and unfit to have the use of the money.

Then it was Bonair's wrath waved high.

"Berry, darling, will you excuse me if I go out and swear a little outdoors? Oh, yes, I know I promised you never to swear again, but a reformed man must relapse at times, you know, and really this seems to me an occasion for profuse profanity!" he said grimly, to the beautiful creature who smiled tenderly at him and answered:

“But do not stay out long, dearest, or I will not forgive you breaking your promise to me.”

He was not absent very long, and when he returned, he said:

“On second thought I didn’t swear at all; I wrote my lawyer to bring suit against my father at once for the payment of my money.”

“Do not worry over it, dear. We have each other, and are happy as we are,” Berry answered, with a coaxing smile.

“Oh, yes, we are happy as we are, but our money will not last much longer, little one, and you have not been well lately, and we will need a lot of money for that sweet secret you whispered to me yesterday,” the young man answered, with a new, dignified gravity very becoming.

Berry’s lovely color deepened, and the glance of her brown eyes was simply adorable.

“But you know we must not travel about, now,” she murmured. “We must settle down and live quietly until June, you know, as the doctor said, so it will not take so much money to live as when we are always on the wing. We can take a tiny little house or a little suite of rooms, and keep house with one maid, don’t you see; or if we cannot afford the maid, why, I can do the cooking myself, you see. Do you know I can make tea and toast, and broil steak, and serve eggs in most any fashion, sir?” she added smilingly.

“I am very glad to hear it, but we need not come to that. I think we can have the little suite of rooms and the maid of all work. My lawyer will be glad enough to furnish me the means of subsistence while he is prosecuting my suit,” the young husband answered confidently.

The plan was carried out, and by Berry’s wish they made their little home in London, for she was tired, she said, of the foreign lingo she couldn’t understand, and wanted to stay among people who spoke her mother tongue.

So they came from France and Italy, where they had passed the winter months, to London, where, in a comfortable but not luxurious suite of rooms, with a buxom maid of all work, they lived quietly and happily

until May. Berenice devoted her time of seclusion in studying the languages under the tutorship of Charley, who was quite proficient in that line.

Thus quietly and happily they waited an event that was to crown their wedded lives with happiness.

Alas! fortune frowned on their springing hopes. Their little baby died, soon after birth, and was laid tenderly away in a wee green grave. But for over six weeks, a battle of physicians went on, with grim death in the foreground, trying to snatch Berry from their fostering care.

Never till now did Charley Bonair realize the depth and strength of his love for his precious wife. Sharing the vigils of the doctors and nurses with ceaseless care, he grew to feel to his heart's core all that she was to him, and knew that if she died, life would be unendurable to him forever after.

Oh, what joy when the wavering balance of life and death dropped her into her husband's arms again, with the chances in her favor for recovery!

While she lay so ill, he had learned to pray, this man who had almost forgotten his God, and now he sent up a prayer of thanksgiving for her restoration.

While she was slowly convalescing, the head physician ordered that Mrs. Bonair should be taken, as soon as she was able to be moved, down to the sea, naming an obscure and rude little fishing village on the coast of Cornwall as the preferred situation.

"She will have absolute calm and quiet there, and it is very essential to her shattered nerves and frail condition of health," he said.

"We shall be buried alive," Charley said grimly to his wife when he took her there, but she answered, with her usual sunny good nature:

"At least we shall be buried in the same grave, so I am content."

"And I," he answered as happily.

Thus we find them, in late August, by the sea, where Berry recovered

her health and spirits again, and so in love with the free, wild life of the unconventional village of hardy fisher folk that both were loath to leave. So they lingered on, from day to day, saying “it is so pleasant staying, and so cheap living, we will not go away until we get news from California of the success of the suit for his mother’s fortune.”

Since she grew well and strong again, Berry had taken up her studies with zest, by Charley’s wish, trying to make herself equal in education to any position she might be called on to fill in the future.

For she knew now that, dearly as he loved her, there was a silent ache in his warm heart for those who cast him off in anger, and that he hoped against hope for a reconciliation at some future day when his bride’s true worth and beauty shall be known and acknowledged.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TURN OF THE TIDE.

The lawsuit had dragged on interminably for six months, and it seemed as if a decision would never be reached, so that Charley was getting very poor, indeed, and very impatient, although, to tell the truth, he was finding that love in a cottage was very charming, after all, as there were funds enough coming from his lawyer still to keep the young pair in bread and cheese and a little more.

In the meantime Charley's two beautiful sisters had both married in June, and the newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic had duly chronicled the grand double wedding at Bonair, when Marie and Lucile had wedded the rich New Yorkers to whom they had been betrothed before Charley's mad marriage. They had crossed the Atlantic on their wedding tour and were now in Switzerland. Along with reports of the wedding was an item that made Charley throw down the paper he was reading, with a sigh from the bottom of his heart.

"Hello, Berry, we are in hard luck now, to be sure! Dad will never be reconciled to us now, never! He is going to give me Rosalind for a stepmother!"

Berry was lounging on the sands in an old blue boating suit, her hat lying at her feet and her curly hair blowing about her tanned face and rosy cheeks that suddenly grew pale, as she turned a solemn pair of eyes on his face.

"Oh, no, no, no, he must not!" she exclaimed vehemently.

Charley Bonair gave a curt, angry laugh, replying:

"Easy enough to say, but how are we going to prevent it, pray?"

"Yes, how, indeed?" Berry answered, turning a troubled gaze back to the sea, with the white caps rolling in, the seagulls flitting about with their strange cries. She had no more to say, and Charley picked up the paper

again and said:

“The engagement has been authoritatively announced, and my silly old dad has commenced the erection of a palace in Washington where she will reign a queen at the next session of Congress. Isn’t it a burning shame?”

“Yes—she is not worthy of your father, if he is as good and kind as you say he is in spite of his injustice to you,” Berry replied, with palpable chagrin, her brooding brown eyes still upon the sea as it gleamed in the morning sunshine, fairly dazzling her sight.

The young man frowned and sighed, then burst out frankly:

“It’s true all I said of him, Berry, darling. He used to be just the dearest dad in the world, kind, loving, and indulgent to a fault, and so were my pretty sisters, too; and I never dreamed they could turn against me in the way they did, and hold out spiteful all this time. But I see how it is now! It’s that scheming Rosalind setting them on, determined to get the Bonair millions for herself, either through the father or the son. Her mercenary spirit and her thirst for revenge have led her on to this, and poor dad has been like wax in her clever hands, so she has molded him to her will. Berry, I always heard that a handsome woman could make a fool of the smartest old man, and now I see it’s true. It’s flattered vanity, that’s what it is, or an old man might always see that no pretty young woman loves him for himself alone. It’s always for some cash he has in hand! Oh, Berry, why did you make me swear off on profanity? Surely this is an occasion for it!” he groaned.

“Oh, don’t Charley, dear! It would not help things any,” she answered gently.

“At least it would relieve my feelings,” he answered ruefully, adding whimsically:

“Say, Berry, see that old fisherman tacking in to shore, below there? Black Dobbins they call him, and he is the most picturesque swearer you ever heard of on the Cornwall coast. Say, I’ll go down there and give him a crown to swear a blue streak of lightning for me. Don’t you listen, darling, unless you want to have that creepy feeling running down your

spine."

He strolled away, but before he got to Black Dobbins, Berry called after him hastily:

"Oh, Charley, come back! You didn't notice the letters with your mail; you were so angry over the news. Here's a letter from your lawyer in California, and another from those dear, good Clines."

"Read them while I attend to business," he returned, keeping on, and saying to the fisherman:

"What luck, Dobbins?"

The net was nearly empty, and Dobbins replied with a string of appalling oaths to which Charley listened with perfect complaisance, after which he threw the angry fisherman a silver crown, exclaiming:

"Those are precisely my sentiments, Dobbins. Accept this token of my appreciation!"

While the man gaped in amazement, he laughed again and turned on his heel, going back to his wife.

"I feel better! That fellow comforted me. He swore at his ill luck and I applied all the 'swear words' to Rosalind, and paid him a crown," he said drolly. "Ah, my dear, you look brighter! Any luck?"

"Oh, Charley, Charley!"

"Oh, Berry, Berry!"

"Don't laugh at me, you dear old silly! I can hardly find words to tell you, but—but"—radiantly—"our luck has turned at last, Charley. You have won!"

She flung herself, tumultuously, into his arms, regardless of Black Dobbins, gazing curiously from a distance, and joyfully fingering the generous crown, and Charley hugged her tight, crying:

"Hurrah! hurrah! Five hundred thousand dollars for you and me, little lovey-dovey, and now you shall be a little queen! I shall deck you out in

silks and laces and diamonds, and buy you an automobile, sure; and we shall be as happy as the day is long!"

"We are happy as that now, and we could not be any happier if we had all your father's millions. All we wish is his good will," Berry answered seriously; then drawing back from his embrace, she added:

"That old man is staring at us; perhaps thinking we have gone suddenly mad! Sit down and read your letter like a dignified, married man, now."

He obeyed, and found that all she had said was true.

The suit was won. His father's lawyers had given up and the case was definitely closed. Senator Bonair indeed had sailed for Europe some time previous, and perhaps his son had seen him somewhere before this. He hoped, fervently, that they might meet and make up their quarrel before the consummation of the senator's reported engagement to the beautiful belle, Miss Montague. Otherwise it was certain, in the event of the marriage, that Charley would never get a dollar of his father's money.

"Dear old dad, it is not his money as much as his good will that I covet!" cried the young man, adding:

"Ah, Berry, how glorious it would be to have you in Washington next winter, queening it over my father's new house instead of hateful Rosalind. You are so lovely, so winning, I predict you would carry society by storm."

"There's no danger of my ever having an opportunity to do so, but so long as I can queen it over your heart I do not care," she answered lightly, though her heart beat high at his words of praise.

She was only a woman, after all, and she longed to show Charley's proud relations that she was worthy of his love, and that she had made a better man of him by her tenderness; but it could never be. They would never forget she was born in a lowly cot, wreathed in morning glories, instead of a lordly castle. She would not have cared so much only she would like to win their favor for Charley's sake, because it would make him so happy.

She turned to the letter from the Clines, who were doing well in another place in California, and who related the news of the double marriage and reported engagement, as they had just read in the newspaper, and closed with their dear love and respect to Mr. Charley and his bonnie wife.

And now the young husband began eagerly, with shining eyes:

“It is more than likely father will be in London, now. Oh, Berry, what if we go up there and try for a reconciliation? Perhaps his heart may have melted by now.”

“Dearest, do you remember what the doctor said? I must not go away from the sea till the last of September. But although I cannot go with you, there is nothing to hinder your going alone. I can stay here with the maid till you come back to me. See, I will not be selfish. Although I came between you and your father’s heart, my dearest wish is to see you friends again, even though he should never speak to me. Oh, go, go, my dearest love, and try to make your peace with him!”

“Darling little angel, I will take you at your word, for my heart yearns to my silly old dad, that’s a fact,” he cried eagerly, and before night he was en route for London, leaving Berry at the cottage alone with the buxom maid, who, to dry her mistress’ tears, immediately proceeded to retail all the news of the village.

Had she heard about the grand, rich gentleman up at the inn, in the hollow, who had sickened with smallpox the very day he arrived, and was lying at death’s door up there without a nurse or a doctor, for everybody had fled the pestilence in alarm, and there was no one to care for him but the valet, who cursed the cowards, and was waiting on his master all by himself, doing the best he could, promising loads of money for help, but no one would believe his tale of riches, or that his master was an American lord, standing up close to the very president himself. His name? It was Bonny Hair or Bonny Air, or something very like it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FRIEND INDEED.

The loquacious maid who had been pouring out her story without a single period, now paused for breath, and Berry stared at her with wide, wondering brown eyes.

The name of the sick American, as rendered by the maid, caught her instant attention.

“Bonny Hair, or Bonny Air—something like that,” said the maid, and how like it sounded the name of Bonair.

A quick suspicion stirred Berry’s mind into agitation.

“Why, it might be Charley’s own dear father lying there ill, and deserted by the stupid, fearsome fisher folk, helpless, for all of his millions, to secure a nurse!”

Her brown eyes flashed, and she rose up hastily.

“Hannah, I’m an American, too, and I’m going up there to nurse the old man. I cannot let my fellow countryman die for lack of a friend.”

“But, oh, my dear mistress, it’s that terrible smallpox. You wouldn’t dare! You would catch it and die.”

“No, Hannah, I’m immune. I had the disease years ago, way back in my old New Jersey home, and am not even pitted, you see, save two deep scars where it does not show. So I shall go, and at once, leaving you to care for the home till I return.”

With Berry to make up her mind was to act. She dressed herself simply and comfortably, and packed a suit case with necessary clothing, after which she went to a drug store and made some purchases. After leaving a letter for Charley, she hired the nearest conveyance to take her to the inn where she meant to take up the part of a good Samaritan.

The driver was so frightened when he saw the yellow flag waving from the gate of the inn that he refused to go within a square of the house, and she paid him and walked the rest of the way, with her luggage and her bundles.

How lonely and deserted looked the weather-beaten old inn with the doors tight shut and the curtains down, as if death already brooded over the house.

Berry pulled the knocker several times, loudly, before she had any response, and then the valet, unkempt and unshorn, himself answered the door and gazed in surprise at the beautiful girl standing expectant with her luggage at her feet.

He bowed, then stammered:

“Oh, miss, you had better go right away. Didn’t you see that yellow flag at the gate? There’s a case of smallpox in the house, and no travelers are taken in now.”

“Where is the landlord?” she asked, and the man answered furiously:

“The cowardly rascal ran away, with his servants, and left me alone here with my sick master; and although the fellow promised to send me a nurse or doctor, or both, not a hair have I seen of either yet, and here I am with Senator Bonair on my hands, ill as he can be, and I daren’t leave him to hunt for any one to help me; and even if I went they would shun me like a wild beast, fearing the contagion. It’s a burning shame, so it is; but I’ll not run away like a coward, though, belike, I’ll be taking the disease myself and dying of it, too.”

His mouth flew wide open as Berry said calmly:

“I am the nurse for Senator Bonair, and I shall vaccinate you at once—what is your name?”

“John Tousey, please, miss.”

“Very well, John; take my luggage to a comfortable room, please. And the next thing will be to vaccinate you so that if you should contract the disease you will only have it in a light form. I came prepared for this,”

and making him bare his arm she took a lancet, scratching a small spot on it, with outward nerve and inward quaking, feeling, when the blood was drawn, that queer sickness that presages fainting. Overcoming the weakness with a strong effort of will, she duly used her vaccine point, much to the man's relief, for his countenance brightened, and he exclaimed:

"Bless you, miss! I'm so glad you came, and I hope this will save me from that awful scourge. I began to think the old landlord lied, when he said that he'd send us the nurse and doctor."

"I was told at the drug store that the doctor was ill himself, so there was none to come but me," the nurse replied, adding:

"But I know how to treat the case very well myself, as the disease ran through my own family once, and there's more in the nursing than the medicine, so lead me to your master and we'll see what is to be done."

With joyful alacrity, the man preceded her to the darkened room where lay her millionaire father-in-law in the terrible plight of a smallpox patient at the worst stage, without benefit of doctor or skillful nurse.

Berenice took hold of everything with an ease that fairly charmed John Tousey, evolving comfort out of chaos, and soon making the sick man more comfortable in every way.

The larder was well filled, so that, although isolated from their kind, they were in no danger of starving. Berry took up her burden with a cheerful heart, thinking:

"Although Senator Bonair may despise me for being a poor cottage girl, it is well for him now that I am skilled in homely accomplishments, that I may minister the better to his needs."

She wondered, as she went busily about her work, when Charley would return and what he would think of the task she had undertaken. He would be disappointed at finding her gone, but he could not blame her, could not think she was in the wrong.

She had written to him sweetly:

“I have isolated myself from you for a time, my dearest love, but when I tell you why I am sure you will be glad for me to do this act of kindness.

“I heard that a man who must surely, from his name, be your own father, was up at the inn, very low with smallpox, and that every one but his valet had deserted the poor man, and he was likely to die without doctor or nurse, so I thought it was my plain duty to come and nurse him.

“There is no danger for me, you know, because I have had the disease, and I also know how to treat it, so do not worry over me, but go and get vaccinated as soon as you can and try and get some good doctor to come and see the patient.

“Dearest, try to rest easy. You can hear from me every day this way. I will wave a white flag from the window every day at noon. That will mean all is going on right. Be patient, I will do all I can for the dad you love so well.

“Berenice.”

CHAPTER XXX.

A GENEROUS OFFER.

Poor Charley, returning next day from London, depressed and discouraged at not seeing his father, was dazed to find his sweet wife gone, and to get her letter of explanation.

But after the first shock of surprise, and trouble, his warm heart thrilled with joy and pride at her noble deed.

“Father cannot help but forgive us now if she should save his life, dear girl, for when once he knows her how could he resist her grace and beauty?” he said, over and over, to himself hopefully, for the yearning for reunion with his kindred was strong within him.

“Rosalind is at the bottom of it all. If I could but break her influence, all might be well again; but she is posing as injured innocence and beauty, and hardening their hearts against me for her sake,” he thought, with impatient resentment. Then he put it from him to write a long letter to Berry—a real love letter, full of praise and tenderness, which he went and slipped under the front door of the inn that night.

She very soon found it, and smiled to herself as she appropriated the sealed envelope addressed simply to “The Lady Nurse.”

Hurrying to her tidy little room, she read the loving contents and kissed the letter over and over, hiding it next her heart, while she returned to her duties by the sick man, who was very ill indeed, with his eyes quite shut so that he could not see the vision of beauty and tenderness that bent over him. But not so wholly unconscious that he could not feel the balm of healing carried by the soft white hands that touched him so gently. He knew, dimly, by her gentle ministrations and the improved food, that the valet now had efficient aid. And that was enough, in his feverish state, to soothe his mind.

Within twenty-four hours came the physician engaged by Charley. Though he shook his head over the gravity of the case, he approved all

that Berenice had done, and desired her to continue at her post.

So the days came and went and the disease ran its course quickly, while John Tousey also came down with a light case, so that the physician recommended another nurse, an elderly woman, who took second place to Berry in the conduct of the invalids.

Charley had taken the young physician frankly into his confidence, telling him to safeguard his young wife's health very carefully, and by him he sent her daily letters of love and cheer, telling her how he missed her, and of the pride he felt in her noble mission.

But, ah, how they missed each other, the loving pair; how slowly the weeks of absence went, and how happy the day when Doctor Perry said to the lonely husband:

"My patients are convalescing fast. The valet is going to sit up to-day, and to-morrow the senator will be allowed to sit up for an hour or two. He is quite out of danger, and I am going to tell your wife she may leave him to-morrow and come home. I am not sure the patient will like it, for he is devoted to her and impatient of the elderly woman, but he will have to bear it."

He was right, for when the senator was told next day that Miss Brown, as they called her, was going to leave him, he protested vigorously; said he could not spare her yet; he needed her to read and talk to him, and was willing to pay any price to have her stay on even one week longer. Why, his eyes had only got strong now to see how lovely and charming she was, and he needed some one pleasant to look at since he could not have his daughters, who were both on their bridal tours, and to whom he had not allowed any message of his illness to be sent.

"But you have a son, sir?" interrogated Doctor Perry.

The invalid's face gloomed over, and he answered curtly:

"I had a son, sir, but he died to me when he disgraced his family by jilting the sweet young girl to whom he was betrothed, and wedding a low-born, scheming actress."

He did not hear a low, soft sigh outside the half-open door, for Doctor

Perry said, with apparent surprise:

“You astonish me, sir, for we English have been led to believe that in your favored land of America you raise no barriers against marriage with those of inferior birth or fortunes.”

The senator answered testily:

“We raise no barriers against true worth, Doctor Perry. I myself am a self-made man, risen from poverty, and not ashamed of it. But you have heard that circumstances alter cases? Well, let me explain. My son’s offense had not been so unpardonable had he been free to choose the girl he wed, but when he took the marriage vow he dishonored himself and his family because he was already pledged to another, a girl whose heart was almost broken by his falsity.”

“Yet rumor says that she is already consoled by a promise of your hand, sir,” the young physician ventured.

Senator Bonair’s face already reddened by his illness, flushed deeper as he exclaimed:

“You seem well posted on my affairs, sir.”

“I beg your pardon, but no offense was meant, my dear senator. Surely you know that the affairs of so eminent a person as yourself are public property. All I have spoken of to you I have read in the London newspapers, but perhaps I should not have ventured to discuss them with you.”

“You might choose pleasanter subjects,” the senator answered quickly. “For instance, my pretty young nurse whom we were discussing just now, and to whom Tousey says I really owe my life, coming to me as she did when I was in the worst stages of my illness.”

“Tousey tells the truth. You could hardly have lived a day longer without her kindly ministrations at the time she came to you. But the time has come when, for the sake of her own health, she must forsake you and go home to rest.”

“Ah, she is tired, broken-down—you mean that?”

“Somewhat that way, for Miss Brown herself has had a serious illness this summer, and that explains why she was found in this rude village where she remains to strengthen her health. I hardly believe it safe for her to remain another week in attendance on you. But here she comes,” as a light step crossed the threshold, “and I will let her speak for herself.”

Berenice entered, graceful as a young princess in her snowy white gown and becoming nurse’s cap, and she gave the doctor a roguish smile that plainly said:

“I’ve been eavesdropping, but, of course, you knew that I was there.”

He smiled back at her and retired, leaving her alone with the patient, who, in his dressing gown, lay back at ease in his reclining chair, watching with admiring eyes every movement of his fair nurse.

Berry sat down close to him and looked, shyly, into his face, trying to appear at ease, though her poor heart thumped wildly against her side, and the fitful color came and went, like a flag of distress, in her cheeks.

“Ah, you are getting on fast, sir!” she cried, with a slight tremor in her musical voice. “Your eyes seem quite strong to-day, and that blistering red skin is getting fairer. How fortunate, too, that you will only be pitted very slightly, and if I could but have come to you a little sooner you need not have carried a single scar.”

“You came in time to save my life, dear child, that was enough,” replied the great man, so kindly that it emboldened Berenice to exclaim:

“Oh, how glad I was to serve you, sir! I can never make you realize it. It is sweet to save a life so valuable to the world and to so many friends who love you.”

He smiled at her gratefully.

“Among those latter friends, please let me have the pleasure of counting you, henceforth, Miss Brown,” he answered. “In my gratitude to you for all you have done for me in this terrible illness, I look upon you almost as a daughter, and am eager to advance your interests in any way most pleasing to you. Our good doctor has just told me that you must leave

me soon, to my great regret. But, as he puts it, on the score of your health, I dare not protest against my ill fortune in losing you, just as we begin to know each other well."

"Your words make me very, very happy," she sweetly said, "but do not think that I intend to desert you altogether, for I shall remain in the village a while longer, and I will come and see you every day, if you will let me."

"I shall be only too glad to have you come whenever you will, my dear young lady, and I wish you to understand that I take a deep interest in you and am anxious to reward you beyond your mere salary for all you have done for me. Tell me frankly, Miss Brown, if there is any great favor, financial or otherwise, I can do for you?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

ALLOY ALWAYS GLITTERS.

Berenice was so overwhelmed with joyous excitement that the tears rushed in a torrent to her eyes, and she half sobbed:

“Ah, you could do much for me if you would—but—I fear to ask.”

“Only try me, dear girl; only name your wishes and see. If you need money, and very likely you do in your position, I am very rich and surely the saving of my life is worth a little fortune to me. Come, dry your tears and let me make you happy. I shall write you a check for five thousand dollars. That is little enough for all I owe you, too little! Will that please you?”

She flung out her white hands convulsively, sobbing:

“No, no, no—not a penny! I am not rich, but a fortune is not what I crave. There is something dearer, dearer!”

“What else, child, speak? What other favor can I do for you?” the senator asked, in growing wonder.

He was more amazed than ever when the white-gowned figure knelt, humbly, at his feet, with little, upraised, beseeching hands.

Berenice pleaded, wildly, through raining tears:

“Oh, sir, there is one who loves you dearly, one whom you used to love, but your heart is turned against him and he is in bitter sorrow for your anger. It was I who unwittingly came between you, and if I have done aught to merit your favor, the reward I ask is not for myself but him—only this, forgive him, take him back to your heart!”

There was an awful silence.

Senator Bonair sat still, growing deadly pale through his florid color, like a statue stiffening into stone, his eyes fixed, sternly, on the

beautiful, kneeling suppliant.

“Who are you, then, if not Miss Brown?” he asked, in a hard, cold voice.

“Oh, don’t you know already, sir? Have you not guessed?” she faltered.

“Are you my—I mean Charley Bonair’s wife?”

“Ah, yes, yes—I am his wife, the little actress you hate because she rivaled proud, rich Rosalind,” she confessed. “Must I go now, must I go?”

“Not yet. Wait and tell me if this was a plot to creep back into favor for the sake of my fortune? Did Charley send you here to nurse me so devotedly that I could deny you nothing?” The tone was harsh and grating.

Berenice, still kneeling, put up her small hands as if to ward off a blow.

“Ah, cruel, cruel!” she moaned. Then bitterly: “How could you think your son so low? Did he show a mercenary spirit when he married poor little Berry Vining? Oh, may I tell you all about it? Will you listen fairly?”

“Yes, I will listen, but stop crying first and get up and sit in this chair close by, while you tell me how it happened.”

Berenice, looking adorably pretty and pitiful, obeyed him, and after drying her wet eyes again, said patiently:

“It was this way, sir: Just as I tell you, Charley loved all of you dearly and grieved over the separation, not for your money’s worth, but for true love’s sake. So that day when he read you were in England, he said he would go and find you and beg your forgiveness. But I—I—was timid and afraid of you, so I stayed here. I refused to go. When he was gone I was lonely, and the maid told me of the desperate case of the sick man up here, with no doctor or nurse, so I thought it must be you and I came to you, asking no one’s leave because I knew when Charley should come back he would feel I had only done my duty coming here to succor his dear father. And I was right, for so he said in his letters afterward. Oh, sir, we are not after your money, we only want your pardon—for him, if not for me, poor Charley! Because he loves you so! As for me, I have done very little, really, for there was no risk nursing you since I had

already had the disease years ago. I—I—might never have told you who I was, or claimed any favor, only that you bade me to, and then my heart leaped at the thought of my husband. Oh, cannot you understand?" She broke down and hid her lovely face in her dimpled hands.

Her dazed father-in-law sat watching her, noting her wonderful grace and charm, recalling what his son had said to him the day of their bitter quarrel.

In his weakness and loneliness, the old love, smothered under anger, seemed to surge upward again and flood his whole being with tenderness for his son. But he called pride to his aid, lest she should see too quickly, this lovely suppliant, how the ice was melting around his heart.

"Tell me," he said, and his voice sounded stern and harsh in her ears, "tell me all about yourself and Charley—how you first met, how love grew between you until he forgot his troth to Rosalind. Begin at the beginning; leave nothing unsaid."

Berenice obeyed, nothing loath, for it pleased her to recall everything connected with Charley, and she left nothing untold from the hour of their first meeting until now.

Senator Bonair, resting easily, with half-closed eyes, did not miss a word of her story, nor an expression of her radiant face that glowed with happy blushes as she told her tale of love.

He sighed heavily, and turning to her as she ended her story, remarked:

"It would make a pretty novel, this love story of yours and Charley's, and I should not have found much fault with it if Rosalind had been left out of it, but her wrongs made me indignant, caused all my bitterest anger against you both."

"It was sad," replied Berenice, "that she should suffer for our happiness —very hard. But it was better for Charley to tell her the truth frankly, as he did, and ask for his release."

"Yes, I agree with you on the latter point, but Rosalind denies that Charley ever asked for a release. She claims that she was betrothed to

him all the while, and her mortification was so extreme that to palliate my son's offense I——" he paused and bit his lips, but Berenice finished the sentence for him:

"You threw yourself into the breach, with your high sense of honor, and offered to heal the wound by marrying her yourself, thus still making her prospective heiress of the Bonair millions, the high stakes for which she was playing."

He quickly took up the cudgel in Rosalind's defense.

"Hush! she is not mercenary. I am sure she loved my son dearly, and can never give me but a tame affection. If I believed Rosalind unworthy of my respect and love, I could sooner forgive my son's perfidy. For I must own you are a very charming little lady!" exclaimed the senator frankly.

She smiled up at him gratefully.

"Not little lady—little daughter," she pleaded.

"Little daughter, then," he amended smilingly, and felt his heart thrill warmly at the word.

"I thank you a hundred times!" she cried, blushing with joy, and adding: "Now I know you will forgive Charley and call him son."

He answered gravely:

"Do you think if I will forgive him and receive him again he will be content with that? For you know I have disinherited him out of justice to Rosalind, whom I am to marry."

"Oh, sir, if you marry Rosalind, Charley will not strive for the miserable money. We have been happy without it for more than a year. But—but—I prophesy that you will never marry Rosalind, because you will learn, before it is too late, that she is unworthy of you!"

He frowned, and said:

"Nay, you have already wronged Rosalind enough; let her name rest. She will surely be my bride."

Berenice sighed and held out her hand, replying:

“If I believed that, I should be very sorry for you, sir. But I must be going now. My poor boy is wearying for me this long time. Tell me, do you forgive him? May he come to-morrow?”

“He may come to-day. I am too impatient to wait,” the senator cried, with a sudden outburst of tenderness.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN OLD FOOL.

September slipped into October and Miss Montague returned home again from Bar Harbor, where she spent the summer.

Up at the hall it was very gay, for she was entertaining a house party of her friends, to all of whom it was well known that her trousseau was being made ready, and that before Christmas she was to be married to the multimillionaire, Senator Bonair.

But latterly Rosalind, although outwardly gay, was inwardly disturbed and uneasy, for in nearly two months she had no letter from her elderly betrothed, and became alarmed lest he should slip through her fingers.

In the absence of her betrothed she had consoled herself by flirting, in which she was an adept, and managed, on the whole, to pass away time very pleasantly.

There was one man who had danced attendance on her all summer, a handsome, dark-eyed, jealous fellow, that she preferred to any other, and she said to herself that she would keep him dangling on, till the senator came home, then, she would have to dismiss him for good. He was desperately in earnest, she knew, and she sometimes shuddered, wondering what he would do when he was given his congé. She would not be surprised in the least if he committed suicide; but if he chose to be such a fool, how could she help it?

Now that October was nearing its end, a vague uneasiness began to possess her, for it was quite two months since Senator Bonair had written, and she wondered at his strange silence, and that he did not return home.

Of the two daughters who had gone abroad on a bridal tour around the world, she also heard nothing. The silence was puzzling, annoying. Not even the ubiquitous newspapers seemed to know anything of the great man's whereabouts.

“It looks bad, and I do not know what to make of it,” she said to her mother uneasily.

“Have you written him?”

“Several times, and as the letters are not returned he must have received them, so his silence is hard to understand.”

“It is very hard, indeed, for an old lover is mostly a greater fool than a young one,” said the worldly-wise mother. “Now, the senator acts so indifferently that he is quite puzzling. I expected he would write to you by every mail, and fairly load you with costly gifts, but he seems to almost forget your existence, and as for gifts, you have received nothing but your diamond engagement ring, and that handsome pearl necklace. If I were you, Rosalind, I would call him to time!”

“What could you do, mamma, since he does not answer my letters, and I cannot follow him up, not knowing whither he has gone?” Rosalind cried impatiently.

“I would write him again—a real love letter, pleading and reproachful by turns, insisting on an answer. Make him show his hand, whatever he has got up his sleeve,” exclaimed Mrs. Montague, rather coarsely.

“Faugh! the idea of writing a love letter to that gray-haired man, sixty years old!” pouted Rosalind disdainfully.

“You will have to pass a long life with him, remember, and he will expect love-making from you, too, which is worse than writing a love letter,” reminded Mrs. Montague.

“A long life with that old dotard! No, no, don’t you fancy such a silly thing as that, mamma! When I get him I shall lead him such a dance I shall soon worry him into his grave.” Rosalind laughed heartlessly, much to the displeasure of her mother, who, though worldly-wise and scheming, was not so cruel by nature. She proceeded to read Rosalind a lecture on the duty to the man she should marry, all of which was heard with a rosy face, and interrupted before its end by the exclamation:

“Oh, bother! don’t lecture me! I shall do as I please with my doting old spouse!”

“There’s another thing, my dear, and that is, I think you go too far flirting with this Adrian Vance. We really do not know much about him, who he is, or why he seems so devoted to you. They say he comes of very humble origin, and certainly he is poor enough! You are making him desperate with love of you. You should send him away.”

“I shall do no such thing. I intend to keep him dangling on, to flirt with after I have married old Sir Moneybags!” Rosalind laughed, with an insolence that brooked no further interference.

But she was not quite a fool, this scheming beauty, so she heeded her mother’s advice enough to write such a letter as she advised, and she waited impatiently enough for an answer, for although she did not love the old man, she dearly loved the moneybags she talked of so glibly, and also her revenge on Charley Bonair.

To her surprise and relief, the fond love letter brought a prompt reply.

Senator Bonair had been too ill to write to any one, and not wishing to alarm his daughters or his betrothed, had not suffered any one else to write to them of his illness.

Therefore, although he had had her letters forwarded from London down to the village, he had not troubled himself to reply; and now that he was better he had a weakness of the eyes so that the doctor forbade him to use the pen.

In this dilemma, he had recourse, of all people in the world, to his son, to act as his amanuensis.

The father and son were on excellent terms now, and the young couple had taken up their quarters at the inn at his urgent request, to help while away the dull hours until he was well enough to go.

“Here, Berry, you write the letter for father to his sweetheart!” cried Charley coaxingly.

But Berry, always so gentle, suddenly turned stubborn and flatly declined:

“I will have nothing to do now, or ever, with Miss Montague!” she said,

shaking her dark, curly head.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE UNWELCOME LETTER.

Charley took up the pen to write to his future stepmother, and looked at his father.

“Shall you dictate, sir, or will you tell me your desires and leave the rest to me?” he asked.

“I will tell you what to say, and you may put it in your own words,” Senator Bonair replied.

So it happened in due time that there came across the sea to anxious Rosalind this answer to her charming love letter:

“DEAR ROSALIND: You’ll be surprised to get this letter from me in answer to your loving one to father, but as you have consoled yourself for my fault, I hope you bear no ill will, and that you are willing to let bygones be bygones. To tell you the honest truth, Rosalind, I’m so happy with my darling little wife, I feel at peace and amity with the whole world, and as dad wants me to write you this letter, I embrace the chance to tell you so. I don’t mind your marrying dad, if you love him. If not, please don’t, for his happiness is very dear to me.

“You wondered why dad failed to write to you, and he wants me to explain. Well, this is why: Along late in August he came down here to the little village by the sea, alone, with his valet, and first thing he knew he came down with a horrid case of smallpox, and everybody deserted him but Tousey, who didn’t know a single thing about nursing or cooking, either, so dad was likely to die. By the best luck in the world my wife happened to be in the neighborhood (I was in London myself), and she went to his aid, like a brick (excuse slang). You see, she had had smallpox and knew how to nurse it. She also knew how to get a decent meal, so between her two accomplishments she dragged dad out of the jaws of death. Then she wrote me to send a London doctor, which I did, and although the sick man went down to the gates of death they

dragged him back, and now he is convalescent, but not allowed to read or write yet, so he is using my pen and eyes to allay your anxiety.

"Of course, it follows, dad has forgiven Berry and me, and just dotes now on my charming wife.

"But dad wishes me to say that our reconciliation makes no difference in his duty and his feelings to you, and that he has not reconsidered his disinheritance of his disobedient son. Your marriage dower will be quite as large as he had promised before, and the future must take care of itself. I have won my suit for my mother's money, and if I never get a penny of dad's my little love and I can be perfectly happy without it.

"Dad will be home weeks before the wedding, so don't worry, he says, as he loves you as well as ever. My sisters will be home before the wedding, too, he says, but I don't expect an invitation, and would not come if you sent one! I suppose you and Berry won't care to meet for a good while yet, and I won't force a crisis. We will likely make our home over here, anyway, as Berry isn't used to society, and I'm not rich enough to keep in the swim, either. So when dad goes, I'm going to buy a fine automobile, and we two, my love and I, are going touring in it. We shall be as happy as two birds in a nest.

"The next letter will be from dad himself, telling you when to expect him home. Good luck to you, Rosalind, and good-by.

"CHARLEY BONAIR."

This was the startling letter that threw Rosalind into a fit of angry hysterics.

"The game is lost to me, I feel it, I know it! Oh, why did I let him go away from me over there, where those two scheming wretches were sure to nab him? Why didn't I insist on an immediate marriage, so as to go with him? I was a fool letting him out of my sight as I did!"

"Rosalind, your fears are groundless. Nothing but some glaring fault in yourself would prevent the marriage, and I tremble over this flirtation with Adrian Vance if it even gets to his knowledge. You go too far, indeed, my dear."

“Quit preaching, for Heaven’s sake; you drive me mad!” Rosalind cried angrily. “I shall flirt all I like, and with whom I like, for when I am tied down in wedlock with old Moneybags I shall have to be so proper I shall die of dreariness!”

When she had got over her hysterical fit, she dressed herself with care and went down to her guests, where Adrian Vance always flew to attend to her lightest wish. When they got away by themselves, presently, in a shaded alcove behind the curtain, she said carelessly:

“I have just had a letter from the senator, and the poor old man has had smallpox in a dreadful form. I am wondering if he will be so pitted as to make him more homely than he was before?”

“I hope he may be rendered so hideous that you will break the engagement on sight,” he responded passionately.

“Ah, Adrian, I wish he had your good looks along with his millions. Then I should be happy, indeed.”

He seized her white, jeweled hand in a crushing pressure.

“Ah, Rosalind, why are you so cruel when I love you so well and you pretend that you return it? Let that old man go, and give yourself to me.”

“I promise you now,” she whispered softly, leaning close to him, “that when old Moneybags dies and leaves me his millions, I’ll take you, my dark-eyed Adrian, for my second husband, and let you help to spend the money.”

“You tempt me to murder him by the time the marriage ceremony is over! Have a care, Rosalind, for what you put in my head!” the man whispered back hoarsely.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BITTER MEMORIES.

It was two weeks later that the bride-elect got the promised letter from Senator Bonair, saying that he would follow the letter home, and hoped to greet her by the first of December.

Further on in the letter, the senator mentioned he hoped she was not sorry he had made up his quarrel with Charley and his charming wife. He was getting on in years, now, and it was such a comfort to have a son for a staff to his declining years. Not that he expected to see much of them, though, because the happy pair intended to make their home abroad. Then, too, Marie and Lucile had declined to meet or forgive their brother and Berry, so it was best they should dwell apart.

It rejoiced Rosalind's heart to hear that her friends, Marie and Lucile, had stood loyally by her and refused to be reconciled to Charley and his humble bride.

"It is well that they oppose their father in this, else the foolish old man would be wanting them to come and live with us, and I am determined they shall never cross the threshold of my home when I am married," she vowed to her mother, who approved the declaration, saying that no one could ever expect Rosalind to forgive the injury received at Charley Bonair's hands.

"Speaking of Charley's wife reminds me, Rosalind, that we must try to get that old woman, Mrs. Vining, to come up and help at the hall for a week, finishing up the sewing, as the seamstress says she must have more help or she can never get through in time," continued her mother.

"Very well, I will stop at the cottage as I drive down and see about it, mamma. I suppose she will be glad to get the work, as I don't think Berry's grand match has improved her mother's fortunes. Indeed, I wonder if she even knows that Charley married her hateful actress daughter?" cried Rosalind.

“Oh, yes, I think she has written home of her grand match, for all the village seems to know of it. I have heard our servants talking of it when they did not know that I overheard their silly gossip. But, as you say, it can do her no good. She has not apparently benefited by it, as she still lives in the old weather-beaten cottage.”

“Yes, I will employ her,” declared Rosalind, “if only to have the triumph of seeing Charley Bonair’s poor old mother-in-law toiling for me. Ha, ha! what a spectacle!” She ended with a harsh, grating laugh of smothered rage.

When she drove out with Adrian Vance that afternoon, she got him to wait at the cottage door, in the automobile, while she went to see Mrs. Vining.

The woman’s youngest son, a boy of sixteen, met her at the cottage door, and led her into the small, neat sitting room, saying he would call his mother.

He disappeared, and Rosalind looked, superciliously, about the small apartment with its dingy furnishings, muttering:

“I would rather die than be poor and shabby. I declare I don’t see how very poor folks endure such an existence. Ah, what——” the sentence ended abruptly, and getting up with a swish of trailing silk and flutter of rich laces, she swept across the room to a new easel standing in a corner with a good-sized picture upon it, representing a group of two—a picturesque group of two lovers, a handsome man, a lovely white-gowned girl, standing, hand in hand, amid tropical shrubbery.

Rosalind gazed with idle curiosity a moment, then her eyes flashed, and a keen, bitter pain stabbed her jealous heart like the point of a dagger.

The picture was a large, framed photograph of Charley Bonair and Berry that they had sent to Mrs. Vining months before.

The beauty and the happiness of the handsome pair struck Rosalind’s heart with bitterness, but while she gazed the mother’s voice said, just behind her:

“Ah, Miss Montague, you’re admiring the picture of my little girl and her

husband. It's the image of Berry, bless her dear heart, don't you think so, miss? She sent it to me a while ago, and oh, how glad I am the dear girl is happily married! But I beg pardon, can I do anything for you, Miss Montague?"

"I am to be married soon, you know, Mrs. Vining, to Senator Bonair, and some of my simpler things are being done at home by seamstresses. Mamma sent me to ask if you will come and help finish up, next week? She will pay you more than you can earn at the tailor shop."

"But I am not at the tailor shop now, Miss Montague."

"Indeed? Have they discharged you, then?" insolently.

"Oh, no, miss; I left of my own accord. I'm getting to be an old woman now, and must rest for the balance of my life."

Rosalind looked more closely, and noted a more prosperous air about Berry's mother than she had ever seen before.

"I do not understand how you expect to live without work," she said sharply.

"It does seem strange to you, doesn't it now, Miss Montague, seeing how I have been working and toiling here all my life? My son-in-law, out of his good heart, has sent me a present of a thousand dollars to take my ease on, and says there's more to come when I have spent it all."

"So then you will not come to sew?" Rosalind exclaimed sneeringly.

"No, Miss Montague. I'd rather not, thank you all the same for giving me the chance if I needed it, but Berry wrote I mustn't work any more."

"I'll go, then," Rosalind cried, with an angry flirt of her skirts that tumbled the picture off the easel and splintered the glass over it; while with a smothered, malicious laugh at what she had done through pure spitefulness, she swept from the house, leaving the old woman busy gathering up the fragments.

"I'm cross; I don't care to drive to-day. We will go back home," she said to Adrian Vance sharply.

Mrs. Montague spied her coming, and came to meet her, saying:

“You got back sooner than I looked for, Rosalind, but none too soon, for a cablegram has just come to you, saying Senator Bonair cannot sail as soon as he expected, but hopes not to be delayed much longer.”

“He cannot come? Why? Is this another scheme to postpone the wedding?” Rosalind cried, in a loud, angry voice.

“Hush, Rosalind, don’t fly off into a rage so fast, and I’ll tell you the rest. The senator explains his disappointment by saying that Charley and his wife had a wreck while coming on their automobile from Trouville to Paris, and that both are so terribly injured they may not survive the day.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

DELAYS ARE DANGEROUS.

It was true, that dreadful cablegram that shocked even Rosalind's cruel heart! For a moment she gasped with surprise and grew pale even to her rosy lips.

But the next moment she threw off the spell and laughed gratingly, so that even the worldly-wise mother said rebukingly:

"How can you laugh, my dear girl? It is really very shocking to think of that young pair being so terribly injured in an automobile accident that they must almost certainly die."

But Rosalind only laughed again.

"Mamma, what is the use of your acting goody-goody when you know what all this means to me?" she sneered. "In the first place, I hate Charley Bonair who jilted me, and his wife who supplanted me, with a bitter hatred that can only rejoice in their deaths, so why should I pull a long face, when nothing could please me better? And, secondly, if they had lived, old Moneybags might have revoked his disinheritance of his son, and cut me out of some of his millions at his death. So what seems like a calamity to them is a benefit to me, and I rejoice accordingly. Mother," she added, as with a sudden thought, "I shall cross the ocean to my betrothed's side! I shall have to do the sympathy act, of course—snivel and whine, and pretend to be sorry they are dead, while my heart is full of rejoicing! But no matter, so that I gain my end!"

"But, Rosalind, my dear, what can be gained by such proceedings?"

"How stupid you are, to be sure, mamma! You must be getting into your dotage not to see that if he goes into mourning for his son, and objects to a public marriage with all its attendant sensation, I can easily lure him into a quiet, private marriage on the spot, and come home Mrs. Senator Bonair, don't you see?"

“Yes, yes, that is a very clever idea, Rosalind—a good idea all around, for then we shall be spared the trouble and expense of a grand wedding, for which it would have been hard to raise the money, and your father’s affairs in such a fix! But for that matter it won’t be easy to get it for your trip, either. Besides, you know, I cannot leave your father’s sick bed to chaperon you, and you could not properly go alone.”

“All that can be easily arranged. Our late visitor, Mrs. Brander, sails in two days for Europe to join her married son in Paris, and she will be only too glad to have my company on the trip. For the rest, I can sell some of my jewels for the passage money. I shall have plenty more as soon as I am married.”

“It is all very easy as you have planned it, and I don’t doubt you will succeed with such an indomitable will as you are now displaying,” commended Mrs. Montague.

“We must begin to get you ready to start in the morning to join Mrs. Brander,” she went on. “I suppose you had better break the news to our remaining guests, at once, that Senator Bonair has cabled for you to come to Paris. I hope they will all take their departures quickly, as under the circumstances they ought to do.”

The guests were all of the same mind with her, and after hearing the sad news and offering formal condolences suited to the occasion, did some hasty packing and were all out of the house by nightfall, the last one to leave being Adrian Vance, who said, as he pressed her hand at parting:

“I shall lodge in the town to-night and bear you company to New York on the morning train. Indeed I am not sure but I shall follow you to Paris on the same steamer.”

“Oh, indeed, you must not! I shall not permit it,” she replied, with a glance that belied her word, and silently invited him to disobey her mandate.

As a result he kept his word, and as soon as the steamer left her moorings he joined Rosalind and her chaperon as their traveling companion.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TRUE TO HIS WORD.

It was true that Lucile and Marie, who, with their husbands, were now in Paris, had hardened their hearts absolutely against their brother and his lowly born bride.

They had joined their father at his hotel, but after they had heard the whole story of Berenice's care and devotion that had saved his life, they were rebellious; they could not forgive.

The sisters remembered how beautiful and charming Berenice had been that one night upon the stage at Bonair, but the thought of that beauty only hardened their hearts, since it was this that had made their brother a traitor to Rosalind.

"Papa, we cannot look at it as you do; the cases are different," they said to their father. "And if you want our advice it would be to give them a large sum of money rather than try to secure social recognition for them that would result in many unpleasant complications."

"I did not think you could be so cruel to your only brother who loved you so well," their father said rebukingly.

"He put that low-born actress before us and Rosalind in his heart," was the answer.

"Rosalind, always Rosalind! I am sick of the very name! Do you owe no duty to others?" he cried angrily, and they started with surprise.

"Rosalind is to be your wife and our stepmother—we should consider her first," they replied stubbornly.

"By Heaven, I wish I had never promised to marry the girl! I wish I could get honorably free of her claim, for my son is dearer to me than Rosalind can ever be, and I detest the thought that she is to stand forever between Charley's heart and mine!" the senator stormed, in

sudden desperation, outraged by their heartlessness.

Marie and Lucile listened in the greatest wonder, and they cried out simultaneously:

“We thought you loved Rosalind better than any of us!”

In his anger he replied truthfully:

“I have never pretended to love her, and I regret now I ever made the rash promise to marry her, for very likely she only desires it to get revenge on Charley and Berenice for their fault against her, which was not so dreadful, after all, for my son swears he confessed all to Rosalind first and asked release from his engagement to her, although afterward she denied it to us, and we rashly took her word against Charley’s. When I look back I remember that Rosalind really courted me first instead of my courting her, and through an old man’s flattered vanity and the wish to atone for Charley’s fault, I promised to make her my bride. But now I swear I am sorry for it, and wish I could retreat in honor, for I shrink from putting another in the place of your dead mother, my beloved wife; and, besides, I do not believe in the union of May and December.”

“But, papa, you cannot retreat from your bond. It would be unfair to Rosalind; it would be worse than Charley, for the wedding day is barely a month off,” they reminded him.

“No, I cannot retreat in honor. I must marry Rosalind and make the most of my life,” he replied bitterly, adding:

“Fortunately my private business and affairs of state engross most of my time, and as for her, I suppose she will be happy enough spending my money and flirting with younger men.”

“Oh, papa!” cried Lucile reproachfully.

“For shame, papa!” cried Marie indignantly.

But in their hearts they both knew he spoke truly.

Rosalind was extravagant to a fault, and a bold coquette—they could not deny either charge.

But Rosalind had been their schoolmate and chum; she was in their set, she was handsome in her way, and they would not be ashamed of her, as they must be of poor little Berenice, the lowly born bride of their only brother.

So they held out for Rosalind, declaring it was only loyal to do so, and beseeching their father not to jilt her as Charley had done.

He, on his part, promised faithfulness, and the interview ended, much to the relief of all parties, having been productive of no good on either side.

The young wives, having told everything to their proud and exceptionable husbands, were consoled and sympathized with, and told that they had acted right.

So Senator Bonair, who had almost promised Charley that they should have a family reunion and reconciliation at Paris, was obliged to write to his son that his sisters were obdurate and unforgiving and that when he came to bid him farewell, he could not meet the kindred he loved so well; because, in their loyalty to Rosalind, they would not forgive his folly nor recognize his bride.

It was cruelly hard on Charley, who had hoped so much from his father's intercession, and when he showed the letter to Berenice, he said bitterly:

"They were sweet, loving girls before they came under Rosalind's baleful influence, and I wish they could know her as well as I do, and realize her catlike, revengeful nature, then they would not harden their hearts against us any longer. It is by her cruel machinations I am sure that Marie and Lucile have become so heartless."

"But, Charley, even if we could turn their hearts against her, by telling any harm we knew, it would not be right, because we have already injured her in her tenderest affections," his lovely bride said gently.

"Affections!" laughed Charley scornfully. "All her love is for money and position, and in wedding my father she will gain more than she lost in me."

He was wrong, but he had never realized in his indifference to Rosalind that the girl had doted on him with her whole heart, or that slighted love had driven her to madness. It is true she would not have looked at him twice had he been penniless, but having looked, she had truly loved.

Charley read on from his letter that his father was sailing soon for America, and he hoped they would not forget the promised visit to bid him farewell.

“We will go to-morrow,” the young man said eagerly. “I will tell my chauffeur to have everything ready for a fine automobile trip, so that we may go as fast as the wind, for there is nothing I enjoy so much.”

When the order had been given he returned to clasp her to his heart, and say, with passionate devotion:

“Do not think I am fretting because my sisters will have nothing to say to us. Although I love them well, I love you, my dearest, more than all the world besides. I can be happy without them, and perhaps it is best we should remain sundered from the family since Rosalind is to make one of it, and she would always be plotting against us. Henceforth we will live only for each other.”

Next day came the terrible accident, when the automobile, flying from Trouville to Paris, at a high rate of speed, came into collision with a huge rock that sent it flying upward as it exploded, its passengers being scattered upon the flinty ground, the chauffeur meeting instant death, and Charley and Berry such terrible injuries that it was pronounced impossible for either to survive the shock.

The next day the news was in all the newspapers of England, France, and America, and in the roadside cottage to which the victims had been tenderly carried after the terrible accident, a broken-hearted father and two remorseful sisters bent over the unconscious forms in agonies of grief, the father crying: “Thank Heaven I forgave them!” The sisters, weeping bitterly: “Heaven forgive our cruelty that we did not!”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A LATE REMORSE.

When the dreadful news was carried quickly to Paris, Lucile and Marie forgot all their pride and resentment and remembered only the love and pride they had once had in Charley, their beloved brother.

They set out quickly for the scene of the accident, accompanied by their father and husbands, and they took with them two of the most skillful physicians in the city, hoping they might render some service to the sufferers. When they reached the cottage they found the sufferers hovering between life and death.

The poor chauffeur had met death instantly, and as no one knew if he had any friends at all, preparations were already made to give him a respectable burial in hallowed ground.

When examinations had been duly made it was found that Charley was more seriously injured than his wife. He had an arm and some ribs broken, in addition to many bruises, while Berenice had no bones broken at all, and if she had no internal injuries she ought to recover, the physicians said.

She presently proved the correctness of their diagnosis by rallying under treatment and opening her eyes in a vacant stare that as yet had no light of reason in it; but as for Charley, he was too badly off to show any signs of life for twenty-four hours, save the faint throbbing of his heart. They feared concussion of the brain.

Marie and Lucile, overwhelmed with remorse, outdid themselves in devotion.

As for Senator Bonair, if ever a thought of his betrothed crossed his mind it was with poignant regret that he had given her a promise he could not, in honor, break.

When the patients began to show signs of improvement it only

aggravated his chagrin against Rosalind; but for the wedding he could have taken these two dear ones with him to Washington, where Berenice would have made a lovely mistress for the grand new home he had built.

It was strange how quickly the young wife rallied and improved. She had suffered from severe mental shock more than physical injury, and in a week she was able to sit and watch by Charley's bed and smooth his hot brow with her soft, trembling little hands, vying with the sisters and the nurse who performed the more onerous duties.

A frail white lily, so pure, so fragile, she looked to the sisters who had hated her so, but who now pitied and loved her for her own sweet sake as well as her unfailing devotion to their brother.

So the days came and went until over two weeks had passed; then the grieving family had a great surprise.

There stopped one day before the cottage a carriage, and out of it stepped Rosalind, in her handsomest traveling gown, with an anxious look on her beautiful face.

"Ah, my dear senator!" she cried, holding up her face for a kiss, as he stepped out to meet her. "How glad I am to see you again! As soon as I got your cablegram I started to come to you, feeling that in your trouble my place was by your side to comfort you, for I feared that Marie and Lucile could not come as soon as I."

She had scarcely uttered the words when the sisters came out to greet her with kisses and loving welcomes.

"But I thought you were absent on your wedding tours?" cried Rosalind, secretly chagrined at their return.

They led her into the small sitting room, and she added, with eager curiosity:

"I was told in Paris that your brother is living yet, but cannot recover. Is it true?"

"He is living yet—and we hope he may recover," Marie said tearfully,

without noticing Rosalind's frown at the news.

Stifling an angry sob, Rosalind continued spitefully:

"And that horrid girl—the daughter of our village tailoress—she also lives, I suppose? You cannot kill such people! They are very tough."

She was startled when Lucile said, with a certain proud dignity:

"Please do not talk like that any more, Rosalind, for she is my sister now."

"And my daughter," Senator Bonair said tenderly.

"And a sweet, lovely creature!" Marie added frankly.

"Well, upon my word!" cried Rosalind, in frank anger and amazement. She realized that Berenice was forgiven; worse still—beloved.

An insane anger took possession of her, and she longed to strike every one in the face. It seemed to her, in her fury, that she could kill them.

Her anger gave way to hysterical sobbing, and then the sisters fell to soothing her tenderly and explaining how it all came about.

The senator had retreated, frowningly, at the first signs of hysterics, so the three were all alone, and the sisters felt it was the time to give good advice.

"Oh, Rosalind, you will have to give in and be very friendly, or papa will be displeased with you," they said. "And, after all, it will be better to have peace in the family, don't you think so? For even if poor Charley lives, he and his wife will never intrude on you, unless you invite them, you know. But now, in the face of death, papa will not love you as well if you do not forgive."

It was a bitter pill for Rosalind, but she knew they were still her friends, and she did not care to antagonize them until she gained her point.

She sobbed dismally a moment or two, then lifted a piteous face, and murmured:

"Then I must try to forgive my enemies, for your father is the only

friend I have in the world now, and if he turns against me I am all undone."

"Why, how strangely you are talking, Rosalind—you who have a father and mother, and hosts of friends!" they cried, in amazement.

"Alas! you cannot guess at all my troubles. Listen and you will own that my words are true. My father, in his extreme old age, has met with financial disaster that has wrecked his mind. He is confined to his room, my mother his constant, watchful attendant. But worst of all, I have incurred my mother's anger by undertaking alone this journey to be by your father's side in his troubles. She forbade me to come. She said it was indiscreet, unwomanly, and that I could never hold up my head again if I outraged society by such a step. She refused me the money for my journey, so I sold my jewels to pay my passage over here."

"Dear heart!" murmured Marie, pressing Rosalind's white hand, while Lucile added:

"How noble!"

"Do you think so?" cried Rosalind eagerly. "And do you think your father will be as noble in return? For mamma said if I dared risk my reputation coming to him alone this way there was but one thing a man of honor could do in return for such blind devotion, and that was to marry me out of hand, to silence gossiping tongues. Not that I mind, dear girls, but for mamma's sake—she is old and prudish, you know—do you think he would be willing to quiet her foolish scruples and ease my heart by a quiet marriage to-morrow? Do you think he would be willing to do me this kindness? Will you, my dear friends, ask him for me?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A BITTER SECRET.

“Rosalind Montague here! Ah, Heaven, what ill work is on foot now?”

The words broke almost unconsciously from Berenice’s lips when they told her that her arch enemy was in the house.

She flung out protecting arms, and clasped Charley, as he lay in a half stupor on his couch, murmuring, half distractedly:

“Ah, my love, my love, I must guard you now from her hate as well as from your terrible illness. I will never leave your side, never, my darling, never leave you alone, lest her baleful presence overwhelm your life!”

The startled sisters thought she must have suddenly gone mad with unwarrantable hatred of Rosalind, and they tried to soothe her frenzy.

“Oh, my dear, what wild words are you saying? Do you not realize that it is wiser to be friends with Rosalind, who will have, as our father’s wife, more influence over him than any one else? She is willing to be friends with you, and that is noble in Rosalind, for she was the wronged one in the beginning.”

But the beautiful young wife, who looked so gentle and spoke so softly, could be spirited enough when she chose, and she tossed her head proudly and cried, with flashing eyes and crimson cheeks:

“I will never be friends with cruel Rosalind, never! Oh, take her away from here, I beseech you, and leave me alone with my Charley, in peace and safety. You may all go with her if you wish, only send her away, for I cannot know a moment’s peace under the same roof with Rosalind!”

Lucile whispered to her sister: “It is pure jealousy, nothing else—and how silly in Berenice to fear that Rosalind wants to steal Charley’s heart away!”

“Tell her the truth, and she will get over it,” was the answer.

And so they broke it to Berenice that they had been talking over matters with their father, explaining Rosalind's wishes, and he had agreed to marry her quietly to-morrow, to silence the tongue of gossip that might babble because she had come alone to him across the sea.

Berenice was almost petrified with astonishment at the unexpected news.

"Oh, it is horrible to think of!" she cried vehemently. "Must this terrible sacrifice go on? Will no one save the victim?"

The sisters began to feel very angry with Berenice, she was so stubborn, so unjust to Rosalind.

It was no use arguing with her, she would not listen to reason. They decided to appeal the case to their father.

They told him all Berenice's resentment, all her hatred of Rosalind, whom she had already wronged so deeply, and they told him it was his duty to lecture the unreasonable young wife and compass her reconciliation with Rosalind.

"For if Rosalind is willing to forgive her, Berenice ought to be thankful to be forgiven," they said, very pertinently, and indeed it seemed that way.

So Senator Bonair himself went to argue the case with his daughter-in-law, which he did with all the eloquence at his command, since it was the dearest wish of his warm heart to have all his family on friendly terms.

Berenice listened with downcast eyes and heaving breast to every word, for she knew she was being blamed for causeless resentment.

They thought Charley was asleep in so deep a stupor he comprehended nothing, but suddenly he opened his eyes full upon them with the clear light of reason shining through.

"Oh, Charley, do you know us? Have we disturbed you?" sobbed Berenice. And he answered weakly:

"I have been hearing and understanding all you and father said, and I think you are in the wrong, my darling."

“In the wrong?” she panted.

“Yes, all in the wrong. If Rosalind wants to be friends with us, let us yield for father’s sake, because it will make him happier.”

Berenice slipped her cold hand in his and looked up wistfully at her father-in-law, saying:

“Do you then love Rosalind so very much?”

For a moment the senator hesitated, then he answered frankly:

“I have never pretended to love Rosalind, but I esteem and admire her very much, so that I am willing to marry her, to atone for Charley’s desertion.”

“Then we should all make sacrifices to that end,” she murmured rather bitterly.

“Yes, I think we should,” the senator replied, out of his high code of honor, though his heart was heavy in his breast with thoughts of the wedding to-morrow.

Charley pressed the cold little hand that nestled in his and faltered weakly:

“I agree with father, Berenice. We should be friends with his future wife.”

“Oh, Charley, you would not ask me if you knew all!” she sobbed, then suddenly:

“Forgive me, for we have wronged Rosalind so much that we cannot sit in judgment on her sins. Yes, yes, I will bury my resentment, I will be friends for your sakes, not for hers.”

They were glad of even that concession, and Senator Bonair hastened to say that he would like to bring Rosalind in and have the greeting over, that is, if it would not agitate Charley too much.

Charley faintly protested that he should not mind at all.

So presently the smiling beauty was ushered in to where Berenice sat

stroking Charley's thin hand so tenderly in hers, and though the sight almost drove her wild with anger, she kept her cool, set smile, and spoke calmly, with friendly words of greeting, though the hand she touched to theirs was so cold it made them shudder.

"I am intruding only for a moment," she smiled, and quickly withdrew on the senator's arm, while Charley dropped asleep again, and Berenice sobbed to herself in silent grief:

"Oh, my secret, my bitter secret I have kept so long, would that I could forget it now!"

The day waned to a close, the purple gloaming fell, and the nurse who had had a day off for rest, now came in, saying:

"You have been in so closely all day you must go out into the fresh air and rest a while. I will watch your husband carefully."

She wondered why Berenice caught her hand so tightly, whispering passionately:

"I will not go until you promise to remain closely by the bed and not to trust him to any other, not even his father and sisters, till I return."

"I promise faithfully, madam," returned the nurse.

"That is well," said Berenice briefly, and she slipped out into the fragrant, balmy gloaming, with a sense of relief in the perfect solitude.

She walked down the quiet country road a little way, drawing back into the shadows as a man passed her on his way toward the cottage, reining his horse up there a little later, as she saw to her intense surprise. For a moment, in one hurried glance, she thought she recognized this man. Was he, could he possibly be Adrian Vance, her own mother's prodigal son, by a former marriage? Ah, no! it was impossible that Adrian should appear on the scene, now, after all these years of absence, during which he had never seen or written to his mother.

"I must not go any farther," she said, pausing suddenly and sitting down beneath a low-spreading tree, the center of a thick undergrowth of

shrubbery. “I will sit here and think over my troubles a while, for my heart misgives me I am not doing right to hold my peace and let Charley’s noble father marry wicked Rosalind. She does not love him, I am sure, and—ah, there are voices. Some one is passing; I hope I shall not be seen.”

She drew back and almost held her breath, seeing through the dark branches that a man and woman were walking together toward her retreat. She started in wonder when she saw that it was Rosalind and the man she had seen on horseback.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A STOLEN INTERVIEW.

“I must not go any farther, and I cannot stay out long, for I must not be missed. Let us stop here under the trees and talk a little while, but it was wrong and foolish for you to come, Adrian,” said Rosalind.

“But I could not stay away. I love you too well!” cried the passionate lover, and before she could reply, he continued:

“I was wild to see you and to hear how old Moneybags, as you call him, looks since he had the smallpox. I am hoping he is so badly pitted and ugly that you are disgusted and ready to throw him over.”

Berenice held her breath; she knew it was wrong to listen, but curiosity got the better of courtesy.

“He is homely enough, I assure you, to disgust any squeamish person,” answered Rosalind, with a laugh, “but I would marry him if he were the Old Boy himself, with all that money.”

“How I hate him and envy him!” complained the man bitterly. “If I had only half that money, would you marry me?”

“Yes, for only half of it, and be thankful!” cried Rosalind. “For, after all, I shall not get more than half, anyway. There are his two daughters to inherit, and, besides, he has made up with Charley; and unless I play my cards very cleverly he will revoke that disinheritance and leave him a million or so, very likely.”

“But I thought his son was going to die?”

“Nothing of the kind. He is recovering very fast, and so is his wife, the low actress, and they think I have forgiven them and will have them whining around me after I marry the father. But nothing of the kind, I can assure you, for I have sworn they shall never cross the senator’s threshold when once it is mine.”

“It is hard lines on you, Rosalind, after thinking them both dead.”

“Yes, is it not? I am almost tempted to give him an overdose of something when no one is looking. It would soon finish him in his weak state, eh?”

It almost seemed to Berenice that the man’s shuddering shook the branches where he leaned, or was it only a light wind?

He said quickly:

“Ugh! Rosalind, you make me shudder, you say jesting things so seriously. No, don’t poison the poor fellow. Murder will out, you know. Oh, I say, darling, cut it all and come away with me and be married in Paris. We love each other, and we can be happy somehow. As for money, there’s the gambling table. I never told you I broke the bank at Monte Carlo once. I did, and I can do it again.”

“You’ve been over all that before, Adrian, to no good. Why repeat it? I love you as well as I once loved Charley, but I will never marry any but a rich man, I swear. But I have promised you, and I mean it, that you shall be my true lover, while old Moneybags lives, and when he dies, my second husband,” Rosalind answered frankly, and the man sighed:

“Do you think he will live long, Rosalind?”

“No, not very long, my own Adrian, for there are many easy ways to hurry an old man into his grave. But it is too soon to talk of that, now. Wait till I’m safely his wife and get his will made in my favor, then you and I can plot the finish, see?”

“Yes, I see, and I am with you to the end—and afterward. Ah, Rosalind, what a woman you are! If you did not love me I should be afraid of you!” Adrian Vance muttered huskily.

Rosalind gave one of her harsh, grating laughs, and said:

“Love can turn to hate.”

“You mean that I should beware of you. But I cannot, my queen, for I worship you. And—and—I shall be so jealous of that old man when he owns you that I shall be tempted to thrust a knife into his heart!”

“Pray don’t, Adrian! Poison in his winecup would be safer, you know. But I must leave you, for I have much to do. I am to be married to-morrow.”

“Heavens—to-morrow!” gasped her lover wildly, jealously.

She answered lightly:

“To-morrow, for the senator proposed it and insists upon it.”

“Ah! how shall I bear my jealous agony? One kiss, Rosalind!”

Berenice turned hot and cold, hearing repeated kisses and ardent caresses that made the leaves rustle as they leaned against them, then they sprang apart.

“We must go back, Adrian; I really cannot stay another minute. Do not grieve so. You will not be banished, you know. I shall soon introduce you as a friend of the family. Ha! ha!”

They passed out of sight, still talking, leaving Berenice crouched beneath the tree, with hot cheeks and a wildly beating heart.

Suddenly she got upon her knees on the dewy grass and lifted her wide, horrified dark eyes to the heavens, where myriad stars began to sparkle through the blue.

With clasped hands she prayed piteously:

“Oh, what shall I do? Can I let this fiend impose on this good, honorable old man and shame the name he will give her by a liaison with this unworthy lover, who will help her to murder him at last for his money? Oh, it is too horrible that I should keep her terrible secrets and let the sacrifice go on! I must save him, I must expose her in all her hideous depravity to those who love and trust her now. Oh, show me the way, show me the way to-morrow, to unmask this fiend!”

CHAPTER XL.

THE WEDDING DAY.

Berenice was walking past the open door of the sitting room, when Marie called to her kindly:

“Come in, you dear, pale little ghost, and help us to plan for the wedding this evening.”

Berenice’s heart gave a wild, startled leap as she obeyed.

They were all there together, the sisters with their husbands, the senator and Rosalind, all planning for the wedding that Berenice knew must never be.

The senator placed a chair for her and started when he saw her pallid face with the dark circles around the heavy eyes. Even her little hands were trembling with terrible agitation.

“Really, Berenice, you look ill this morning. Did you have a bad night, dear?” Lucile asked, with affectionate interest.

“Yes, I had a very bad night. I could not sleep. Something troubled my mind,” she faltered.

“You must learn not to take your troubles to bed with you, child,” declared Marie; “it’s the worst plan in the world. But stay with us and we will divert you, talking about the wedding. Do you think this room will do, if we order some flowers? It is very small, to be sure, but there will be no invited guests. Poor Rosalind has not even a wedding gown of white, except an old torn lace robe that she brought in her dressing bag with her, to see if the clever lacemakers of France could mend it.”

“Yes, it is a priceless, real lace gown,” explained Rosalind, “that I wore at a ball at Bonair one night, and some clumsy partner of mine must have put his foot through the edge of the flounce and torn it, for there’s a piece as large as your hand torn out and missing, though the servants

searched the ballroom carefully for it next morning. You remember the very night, Berry," graciously, "for you played on the Bonair stage that night in 'A Wayside Flower.'"

Berenice parted her dry lips with a sort of gasp, and murmured, in husky tones:

"Oh, yes, I should remember it, I think, for it was on that same night the disguised fortune teller, my secret enemy, tried to murder me by pushing me into the bear pit, hoping Zilla would kill me in her rage over being disturbed with her young."

"Oh, that terrible night; don't recall it!" shuddered Rosalind, adding, to change the subject: "My misfortune with my costly lace gown was as nothing compared to your dreadful accident."

Berenice smiled strangely, for all at once there had come to her the answer to her prayer of last night to be shown some way to bring her enemy to confusion.

She forced herself to look at Rosalind, courteously, but feeling all the while like a traitor, as she said:

"But cannot the gown be patched up for the ceremony, some way, with a scrap of lace? I think I might help you, as I have some fine lace, and am rather skillful with the needle. Will you show it to me?"

"Willingly!" cried Rosalind, falling into the trap, and hastening to secure the gown that was folded away in a dressing bag she had brought.

She came back and unfolded the tissue wrappers and spread the lovely web of lace open before their eyes.

There, in the front flounce, was the great tear, as big as your hand, marring all its beauty. Every one began to exclaim over it in sympathy with Rosalind.

"Now, a needle and some very fine thread, please," said trembling Berenice, and when they were supplied she opened a large gold locket on her bosom and drew from it a little wad of lace that when fitted into the torn flounce matched the pattern perfectly.

Several voices cried, in unison:

“The missing piece of lace—how wonderful!”

“You found it!” cried Rosalind, in amazement. “But where?”

But even as she spoke she turned slightly pale, and added:

“Oh, it doesn’t matter where it was found so that I have it back. What a fuss we are all making over a bit of lace!”

“You made fuss enough yourself when it was lost at Bonair!” cried Marie, sharply, while they all fell to watching Berenice, who was putting in the torn lace with neat little stitches, though her hands shook sadly, so that she said:

“I am making a poor job of it, Miss Montague, but you can get a real lace maker to do it over again for you. You see, it makes me so nervous just thinking of the night when I found this scrap of lace, and of all I suffered afterward.”

“Try not to think of it at all,” soothingly said Rosalind, but Berenice raised her dark eyes, swimming in tears, and murmured:

“I must think of it, for it is my duty to tell everything I know about that night.”

“Go on, I am sure it will be very interesting,” exclaimed Clarence Carlisle, Marie’s husband.

“I needn’t tell about that night when I was pushed into the bear pit,” continued Berenice, “for all that are here have heard the story over and over, but some things that I never told before I mean to betray now, and one is that the pretended Indian seeress was no Indian at all, but a disguised and jealous enemy of mine, who desired to compass my death. I am sure of it, for in our struggle on the edge of the pit the woman uttered some angry words, in her own voice, which I instantly recognized. Then I clutched at her, and as I fell I knew I had something clutched in my frantic grasp that I had torn from her gown. It was this piece of lace that Mrs. Cline, simple soul, not dreaming of the mute witness it bore against my would-be murderer, disentangled from my

unconscious fingers and kept for me. But it did not need this mute witness for me, for as I fell I saw my enemy's face and heard her taunting voice, and I knew you, Miss Montague, for what you were, a guilty sinner, wreaking a terrible revenge on a hapless rival. Then when Charley sprang down to my rescue, you flew back and tried to destroy him also by a cowardly bullet, for the Clines saw the white figure running away from the scene of the double crime."

She heard low, startled cries all around her, and lifting her accusing eyes she looked at Rosalind.

Out of her dead-white face her blue eyes glared like two points of steel, with murder in their gleam, and from between her stiff, white lips came bleakly:

"You lie! Had this charge been true, you would have told the secret long ago."

Berenice, paling, trembling, continued:

"You are mistaken, for an impulse of generous pity made me keep your hideous secret locked fast in my own breast, until now. I never meant to speak until—last night—when—I—heard—you—with—your—lover—beneath—the trees!"

"Liar! Viper! Oh, let me tear her false tongue from her lips!" snarled Rosalind, but strong hands pinioned her and held her back, that Berenice might finish speaking.

She turned her dark, solemn, truthful eyes upon her father-in-law.

"Last night the nurse sent me out for a breath of fresh air, and while I rested under the trees a man passed by on horseback and reined up before the cottage gate. He came back presently with Rosalind, and not dreaming of my presence they talked over their terrible secrets together. Those two lovers, Senator Bonair, ridiculed you, laughed at you as old Moneybags, plotted to remain lovers after her marriage to you, and to make way with you as quickly as possible that she might take him for a second husband. Then they sealed their terrible bargain with a hundred kisses and caresses, and went away, unconscious of a

listener, who, to save you, sir, from their cruel machinations, has broken the silence of more than a year to warn you of lurking danger, if you marry Rosalind Montague."

The voice ceased and Berenice waited with a beating heart for them all to denounce her and take Rosalind's part.

Then Senator Bonair said dully, as if shocked into apathy:

"Now, Rosalind, for your defense!"

She answered, with angry evasion:

"If you can take that low creature's word against mine, why need I attempt a defense?"

Marie's husband spoke up quickly:

"I can corroborate Mrs. Bonair's word in one thing. Last night I saw the horseman she spoke of ride up to the gate, saw Miss Montague meet him and walk away with him. Afterward witnessed their return and parting, with a kiss. You remember, Dallas, I told you and asked your advice?"

"And I counseled secrecy over what seemed the close of perhaps a harmless flirtation," Dallas Dreem replied.

"You should have told us!" pouted the young wives, darting angry glances at Rosalind, who, seeing the game was all up, cleared her throat and said angrily, defiantly:

"Take your hands off me, sirs; I shall not touch the little liar. I am only going to say that I admit everything, and am only sorry I did not kill both her and Charley in the bear pit."

Her blue eyes blazed fury, and Senator Bonair cried wrathfully:

"I shall be forever grateful to Berenice for unmasking you and saving me from a detested marriage. Now go to your lover; we must be rid of you as soon as possible!"

"Would you send me away penniless?" cried Rosalind, angry and humiliated at the utter failure of her schemes. "I sold my jewels to come

to you, and my lover is a poor man!"

The senator plucked a great roll of bills from his pocket and tossed them at her feet.

"There are three thousand dollars. It is the price of never seeing your face again," he thundered. "Now go and leave us to the happiness of a reunited family!"

She snatched up the money and the lace gown and rushed from the room. Three days later she and Adrian Vance appeared before Mrs. Brander, in Paris.

"We are married and settled in Paris," she announced calmly. "Old Moneybags was so homely, with his smallpox scars, that I threw him over and married my poor, handsome Adrian. I have written to mamma, but I fear she will never forgive us."

Mrs. Brander thought it all very strange, but later on the truth leaked out, and she knew the false beauty for what she really was—a reckless, disappointed schemer.

But Charley Bonair did not learn all that happened until many days after, when his convalescence was an assured thing and he could hear, without danger to his health, the happy news that Rosalind had been banished in disgrace, and that the senator had reinstated him in his good graces, and given the Washington palace to Berenice as a wedding gift.

CHAPTER XLI.

TROUBLE BEGINS AGAIN.

When Charley had fully recovered, he and his lovely young wife decided to go to England where the first part of their married life had flowed along on mingled currents of joy and sorrow. They hoped to revisit the happier scenes; and, moreover, Charley had still another motive in returning. News had reached Senator Bonair that an old English estate was for sale; and, in the full tide of rejoicing over his deliverance from Rosalind, and his pride in his "united family," he offered to buy the estate for his son.

"No, it's too much for you to do for me, dad!" exclaimed Charley, when the astounding proposition was made. "I don't deserve such generosity!"

"Perhaps not," was his father's laconic answer. "But if I'm of the opinion that you do—well, that should be sufficient. What do *you* say, Berry?"

"Oh, you know I think nothing is too good for Charley!" answered Berry, with a smile. "But, of course, we both appreciate how dear and generous you are."

"Nonsense!" laughed the senator. "I confess I myself have a desire for this Erda estate, but, as I have all I can manage, with my duties in Washington and my country seat in California, I'm quite willing to buy this estate for Charles, if he wishes to join the ranks of the American-English 'landed gentry.'"

Charles was more than willing, as his father knew. He was also profoundly grateful for his father's generosity in making such a gift, which was all the more impressive as it was destined to be the last.

Hardly had the negotiations for the sale been completed, and the Erda estate came into Charles Bonair's proud possession, when the senator, whose health had for some time been failing, fell seriously ill. All that the best English physicians could do proved unavailing; for, after a brief

illness, he died, and was taken to America for burial near his beautiful California estate.

When Charles and his wife finally returned to England, after this sad interruption of their plans, they found surprising news awaiting them at Crumplesea, a summer resort near Thetford Towers, as the Erda estate was called. The news was conveyed in a letter from Rosalind, who had not even had the grace to send condolences to any of the Bonair family.

It was addressed to Berry, and ran as follows:

"You may, or may not, be surprised to know that my husband is your stepbrother, Adrian Vance. He informed me of this fact not long ago, indeed before we were married, but I found I loved him well enough to forgive his humble ancestry, even though in marrying him I was forced to claim kinship with you! We are, therefore, by stretching a point, sisters-in-law, and it is quite likely that, after all, we may meet again."

"I hope not!" said Berry, after a pause.

"Amen to that!" answered Charles. "But we seem to be fated to meet that woman, in one way or another, wherever we go! I wonder how she found out that we are here?"

"She must have seen, in the newspapers, notices of the sale of Thetford Towers."

"Of course! And probably she will expect us to ask them to visit us, in her new capacity as sister-in-law! Oh, she is quite capable of that! Especially now that father is dead. Well, she will be woefully disappointed, if *we* have anything to say about it!"

Berry smiled. "We may have less to say than we think, dear; the matter may be taken quite out of our hands by Rosalind herself. I foresee trouble. Another thing: Adrian is a mere adventurer, a gambler, and if he married her only for her money, how long do you suppose that will last?"

"What a worldly-wise little pessimist you are, dear!" responded Charles, with a laugh. "Come, tear up this insulting troublesome letter, and let's

drive over to the Towers. What's the use of vexing ourselves with a mere chance that may not occur for a dozen years?"

This easy-going philosophy proved to be the wrong one, for they heard again from Rosalind, two years later. This time it was to announce the birth of a daughter, who was to be named Dora. Why Rosalind had taken the trouble to send this announcement to the Bonairs, in spite of their continued indifference to her existence, was not clear to Berry, who merely remarked: "I suppose she has reasons of her own." But Charles saw through this move clearly enough. He readily guessed that Rosalind and her husband had not given up hope of being received at Thetford Towers; all the more now, for the sake of their daughter, Berry's niece, and also because their fortunes were known to be on the wane.

His understanding was aided by reports of Adrian's reckless speculations which he had heard from time to time, during his occasional visits in London.

On one of these occasions, he had, unknown to Berry, received a letter from Adrian Vance, requesting the loan of a large sum of money with which to pay several importunate creditors; and he had even gone so far as to lend Adrian half the amount, hoping thereby to avoid further difficulties with the Vance family. In this hope he was destined to be disappointed; for Adrian suddenly appeared at Thetford Towers, early in the following summer, and sought an interview with Charles and Berry.

The meeting was not pleasant to any of the three. Charles was frankly indignant, Berry cool and reserved, Adrian in a tumult of embarrassment, envy, and resentment.

"Rosalind is well, I dare say," he said, in answer to their perfunctory question. "I've not seen her for several months. She's studying to go on the stage—you'll have her again for a rival, Berry, in your former sphere."

The covert insolence of this seemingly playful remark was not lost upon its hearers, who took no notice of it, however, and soon afterward managed to bring the interview to a close. Adrian departed, no richer

than he had come.

Before the end of the summer, he was killed in a railroad accident on the Continent, and Rosalind, the heiress whom he had reduced to poverty and driven to the stage, left the country, and was not again seen in England for many years. When she returned to trouble and harass her “relatives,” it was in an unexpected and disgraceful way.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN NEW GUISE.

Years passed, fourteen happy and uneventful years, during most of which the Bonairs lived quietly on their English estate, among their friends in England and from America. Charles' sisters, Lucile and Marie, with their families, spent alternate summers at Thetford Towers, or traveling on the Continent, while during the winters the Bonairs fled to California.

One day, in early summer, Berry intended to drive over to Crumplesea, in her motor car, to say good-by to her old friends, the Westons, who were leaving the next morning. Willis Weston had married a charming American heiress years ago, and had become one of the leading dramatists and managers of America.

Charles was absent from England, at this time, having gone to New York on business which would detain him there.

It was a perfect summer day, warm and sunny, and Berry could not help feeling happy and secure from trouble or harm. But as in every life, clouds sometimes gather on the horizon and overshadow it for a while; so now, had she only known it, another storm was impending.

The first sign thereof was a slight mishap which brought the motor car to a standstill halfway on the road to Crumplesea.

Berry, who was somewhat of a fatalist in her way, always declared that the thing was foreordained. Mellish, chauffeur, simply said—sotto voce, of course—that it was "cursed bad luck, though no more than he had expected when Mrs. Bonair would have the car out to-day, after she'd been told that it ought to be sent to the garage yesterday, and she might just as well have used the victoria as not."

The facts of the case may be related in a few words: The motor car had come up over the brow of the hill on its way back from Thetford Towers, and was rolling sedately through the drowsy stillness of

Crumplesea, when a sharp metallic “zing-g-g!” sounded, and off came the tire of the left forewheel. Crumplesea boasted of three hotels and no end of “apartments,” but it could only lay claim to one garage, at the other end of the town, close to where the new hall—dignified by the name of opera house—had recently been erected. Mellish, who had learned this fact from the small gathering of idlers which the accident had collected—and to whom Berry was known, by sight and by name, about as well as the town clock itself—imparted the knowledge to his mistress, and was rather surprised that she took it with such equanimity.

“Very well, send for the man and have the thing set right at once,” she said. “It is only a step to the Crumplesea Hotel, and I dare say that Mercy Blint can manage to make me comfortable and get me a cup of tea while I am waiting. You can come back there for me when the tire has been put on again. But don’t be any longer than is absolutely necessary; I want to get home before dark, if possible!”

And then with the utmost serenity she alighted and walked straightway to the Crumplesea Hotel, which establishment was run by a woman who had once been her maid, and who, on the occasion of her marriage with the under butler, had been pensioned off some years ago.

Inquiry brought forth the intelligence that Mercy herself was absent for the day, but Mercy’s husband was there, and himself showed her ladyship into what was known as the coffee room—every other room in the house being engaged at the time—and rushed away in person to get tea for her.

And here it was that Berry saw another sign of trouble—the glaring, brightly colored aggressively prominent sign which always made her think that to-day’s accident had been foreordained.

It took the shape of a bill announcing the forthcoming opening of the new Crumplesea Opera House, when—to quote the announcement verbatim—“Mr. Milton Dante’s celebrated company of London artists would present the world-famous musical play, ‘The Beauty of Gotham,’ headed by the gifted and beautiful American actress and prima donna, Miss Rosalind Montague-Vance.”

A slow pallor, creeping like a snail, came steadily down over Berry's face as she saw that bill. She stood for a long time looking fixedly at the printed words and not saying one word, not making one sound.

So she was still standing when, some twenty minutes later, her tea was brought into her by the obsequious Blint himself.

She sat down and drank the tea and ate the buttered toast she had ordered, and then rang the bell and called the man back to the room.

"Blint," she said, pointing to the bill hanging upon the wall, "have those people come to Crumplesea as yet? I see they are advertised to open the new hall next Thursday. Have they come here yet?"

"No, my lady, not yet, of course; it's best part of a week until Thursday. The advance agent will be here to-morrow, though, to make arrangements for rooms and the like. Hamer—him as runs the Cliff Hotel, as you may remember, seeing that he's a tenant of yours—got word to that effect this afternoon, and come over to see if I'd any rooms vacant; him not being able to put up the whole party."

Berry pushed back her empty teacup, and rose.

"See that they don't get any, then," she said, in a singularly dry voice. "See that every room in every hotel in the place is engaged for me. I don't care what it costs, I want them all. Engage them for me."

"I beg pardon, ma'am, but—but can you really mean it?"

"Am I in the habit of saying things that I do not mean? I see that they are billed to appear for three nights. Take all the vacant rooms in all the hotels for that period, in my name. Shut them out of every accommodation and force them to go elsewhere, if you can, and that woman, above all!"

The man gave a nervous start and looked as though he had received a shock.

"My lady!" he said, with a frightened look. "Heaven preserve us! it's not her? It's never the—the Yankee woman who married your—your brother, Mr. Vance?"

“Yes, it is. I never want to see her, but I recognize the name; as Mercy would have done, had she been at home. Now go and do what I have told you, and see that the woman finds no place to stop here. If you think the manager of the hall can be bought to cancel the engagement of the company——”

“It is not possible, my lady; the thing was arranged months ago.”

“So much the worse for me, then. However, I’ll do what I can. Go and engage every vacant room you can hear of, and go at once, please.”

Blint, in a state of shaking nervousness, flew to obey, and when, half an hour afterward, he came back to announce that he had done as he had been bidden, he found the repaired motor car at the door and her ladyship sitting in it.

“Thank you,” she said, as Blint came back with the list of the rooms he had engaged in her name. “Reckon up the sum total and I will send you a check for the amount. Home, Mellish.”

And then the motor car swung out into the roadway and rolled off through the fast deepening Kentish dusk.

And this was how it was that when Mr. Milton Dante’s advance agent came down to Crumplesea to arrange accommodations for the company, he found every available inch of room in the several hotels engaged for a week to come.

“Company’ll have to go into apartments, that’s all,” he said, in his airy, offhand way to Mr. Bodwin, the proprietor and manager of the newly erected Crumplesea Opera House. “Dante won’t like that, of course, for he’s struck a rich thing in getting the provincial rights to the ‘Beauty of Gotham,’ and he’s putting on no end of side, and insisting on all the members of the company putting up at hotels, instead of lodging houses and the like. It’s hard on some of ’em—especially the low-salaried ‘utility people’—but he’s in a position to dictate, and it’s that or nothing for most of ’em, poor devils! I dare say there’ll be many of ’em who’ll be as pleased as Punch over the mishap; but if the Montague doesn’t raise the roof, when she learns that she will have to go into apartments, you can write me down as an ass.”

“Dear me! is she a very violent person, then?” queried the manager apprehensively. “We are a very circumspect people here in Crumplesea, Mr. Billet, although the place is gaining renown as a seaside resort, and you quite alarm me with these hints.”

“Oh, don’t let that worry you. She won’t be in the town twenty-four hours before every man in it is gone on her and willing to swear that she’s the sweetest thing that ever happened. If ever she manages to get a hearing in London—and she will yet; she’s not the kind of woman to be kept in the provinces forever—somebody’s title will come her way, I warrant you. And it won’t be a mere empty title, either; it will be one well backed up with capital—trust her for that! She’s a highflyer, and she comes from a country where they know how to get full value for everything. Wait till she gets to London, that’s all. She’s not too old to hook a fish worth landing, even yet.”

“How old is she, Mr. Billet?”

“Ask me something easier! On the stage she looks about twenty, on the street about—oh, well, I’m too old a hand at this business to be caught belying the posters,” returned Mr. Billet, with a laugh and a wink. “But look here; draw your own conclusions. She owns up to five and twenty, and when a woman does that—especially a woman in the theatrical profession—you can safely add anything from five to ten to her figures, and not feel that you are doing her any injustice. Now then, show me the way to the post office, will you? I want to send a wire to Dante to prepare him for this little muddle about the accommodations; and, look here, Mr. Bodwin! take a fool’s advice and don’t you waste your time in going off your head over fair Rosalind when you see her—though, I dare say, you will, for all that; she seems born to make men do it wherever she goes—but just remember that you haven’t the ghost of a chance; and wouldn’t have if you owned all Crumplesea. Remember, I have warned you.”

“Thank you, but it is useless warning. I am already a married man.”

Mr. Billet looked up into his face, and laughed.

“So was Anthony,” he said. “Now come and show me the way to the post office.”

The curtain had fallen upon the close of the second act of "The Beauty of Gotham," and Miss Montague-Vance had disappeared for the nonce from the enraptured gaze of Oakhampton—it was at the Oakhampton Theater that the company was appearing to-night—when Mr. Milton Dante—his baptismal certificate read "Peter Burridge," by the way—came round behind the scenes in a state of angry excitement and rapped loudly upon Miss Montague-Vance's dressing-room door.

"It's me—Milt," he said, in the quiet original grammar of his native Battersea. "I've got something to show you. Can I come in?"

"No. If it's anything important, just wait five minutes and I'll be out."

The five minutes passed and the door opened, and out of it issued a creature so lovely, that even Mr. Milton Dante—who ought by this time to be used to it, Heaven knows—felt a little thrill as the vision dawned upon him.

"Scotland! but you do look scrummy to-night!" he said admiringly.

"Never mind how I look," returned "the vision," with an exceedingly earthy air. "You didn't come here to pay me silly compliments, I fancy; or if you did, you are wasting your time and mine, to no purpose. What is it you want to say to me? Is it anything nice, or the reverse?"

"The reverse, I'm afraid. Our next 'stand' is Crumplesea, and the company will have to go into apartments when we get there."

"Oh! no, it won't; at least I won't. None of your seaside apartments for me, if you please! Let others do what they like—or what you like; I suppose it amounts to that—but I want the best hotel in the place."

"Well, I'm afraid we can't get in. Billet has just wired me that every hotel in the place is engaged by some old fool of a woman called Mrs. Bonair, and that—I say! great Scott! are you ill? Thunder! you're as white as a ghost."

"Never mind what I am or what I am not," she answered, in a singularly hard and singularly uneven voice. "So that woman has heard of my coming and has tried like this to shut me out, has she?"

“What woman? What the dickens are you talking about? And I say, whatever has come over you? I expected you to raise the roof and to shy things when you heard of this, and I’m blessed if you’re not taking it as meek as Moses.”

“No, not quite so meek—as you will learn before this affair is over. So that woman is going to try to shut me out, is she? Well, it will be a bad day’s work for her—I promise you that. I would have let her alone if she had been sensible and let me alone. But she chooses to show her claws, and so I’ll show mine.”

“Who the dickens are you talking about?”

“About this woman, this Mrs. Bonair, who is going to try the trick of shutting me out of Crumplesea.”

“Great Scott! do you know her?”

“Oh, yes, I know her—and what’s more, she shall know me in a few days, and better than she ever knew me before in her life. Look here, here’s something for you to know about me as well—I’ve a daughter.”

“You?”

“Yes. You’ve often wondered where I sent so much of my salary, and now you know. I’ve a daughter who’s nearly sixteen years old.”

“The dickens you say! It can’t be true.”

“Oh, yes, and what’s more, it is. She’s at school, and I haven’t seen her—no, and haven’t wanted to, either—since she was old enough to walk alone. I’m going to see her now, however, and Mrs. Bonair is going to see her, too—see her and hear of her for the first time. Shut me out, will she? Show her claws like that, eh, after I’ve let her alone for all these years? Well, if ever—get out of the way, for goodness’ sake! That’s the curtain bell, and that little beast of a call boy never notified me that it was time to begin.”

And then, without another word, she turned and ran up the stairs to the stage as fast as her little satin-shod feet could go.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AT SCHOOL.

“Fifteen, love,” said Dora mechanically, as she jotted down the score. “No, I beg pardon, it isn’t; it’s fifteen all.”

“Nothing of the sort,” snapped her pet aversion, Gwen Morley, turning on her with a flash of angry resentment. “You’re not paying attention. It’s thirty, fifteen; that last ball was a fault, if it’s all the same to you, Miss Vance, and our side had scored a point before that. It’s thirty, fifteen, if you please.”

“Oh, very well,” said Dora—she made a point of never bandying words with Gwen Morley. “If it is thirty, fifteen, I’ll set it down that way. No doubt I made a mistake; my head aches. Go on with the game, please, and I will try to keep the score properly—if I can.”

“If you can? Well, I like that! What are you here for? I don’t suppose Miss Skimmers sent you out here to twiddle your thumbs and look at the sky, although that’s about all you have done since we started playing. If you can’t keep the score correctly, say so, and we’ll get some other gifted and condescending pupil teacher to do it for you.”

Dora swallowed the affront with no more outward show of her feelings than a slight heightening of her color, and presently the white balls were skimming over the tennis net and flying through the hot, still air again.

But if she said nothing, she thought a great deal, and the term “pupil teacher” rankled, though why it should have done so—unless it was because of the sneering tone in which it had been spoken—she could not tell. For a pupil teacher she undoubtedly was, and had been for this many a long day.

“It is your mother’s desire that, as she cannot afford to give you the full advantages enjoyed by more fortunate pupils, you should do something yourself to assist in paying for your education,” explained Miss

Skimmers, with something of a sneer, when Dora was old enough and advanced enough to enter upon this stage of her existence. “You will divide your time in future between receiving lessons and in imparting them. You are quite advanced enough now to teach the little children of the third form, and I will write and tell your mother so.”

“Oh, yes, do, please,” Dora had said, when she was told this. “If my mother is poor, Miss Skimmers—and I suppose from what you say, she must be—I don’t want to be a drag on her, and I should like very much to do something to help pay for my education. But what is my mother? You see, I was such a little thing when I first came here that I don’t remember living anywhere else or belonging to any one else, and I thought—oh, Miss Skimmers, I didn’t know until this minute that I belonged to anybody or had a single relation in the world. But a mother! How delightful! Have I a father, too?”

“No; I was told that your mother was a widow when you were brought to me; a widow in good circumstances was how the man—he claimed to be her solicitor—who brought you here put it, and I was not undeceived until a year later, when she wrote me to the contrary, and said that, when you were old enough, she desired you to do something toward reducing the expenses of your education.”

Casting back her memory, when she heard this, Dora could readily guess when that time was; for she had a distinct recollection of coming suddenly—and for some reason unexplained at the time—down from the giddy eminence of “show pupil,” who was trotted out to be exhibited whenever a possible new client made his or her appearance, to the undignified position of something that ought to be—and was—kept in the background and translated from the splendors of a bedroom on the first floor to one that had broken furniture and discolored walls and nothing but a thin layer of leaky slates between it and heaven. She had suffered in that upper-story bedroom—suffered agonies of heat in summer and tortures of cold in winter, and the dread of scurrying plaster-disturbing rats at all seasons, whether hot or cold—but it all sank into insignificance now before the glory of having a mother.

“Who is my mother?” she asked of Miss Skimmers, in the gladness of her heart and the joy of finding that she possessed such a glorious

thing. “Where is she? What is she? Oh, tell me, please.”

“I haven’t the slightest idea,” Miss Skimmers answered, as she shrugged her shoulders and walked away. “All my dealings with her have been through a third party. But she is evidently not a person of my class or the class and standing of my other patrons.”

And considering that Miss Skimmers’ parents had been in the green-grocer line, and that her pupils were the daughters of successful drapers, butchers, milliners, and publicans, Dora was rather glad to hear it.

In some strange indefinable way she felt herself of a different clay from the rest of Miss Skimmers’ pupils, and held herself aloof from them. And they felt it, too, and hated her for it, hardly knowing why—only that she always reminded them of a rose in a bed of dandelions, and, try as they would to remember that the dandelions were gifted with the hue of gold, they could not forget that they were little, undersized, glaring, stiff-stalked, piggish, close-to-the-earth things and that the rose was always the rose, and that it was nature’s law that it should hold its head above them and be a nobler flower than they.

For a time, the knowledge that she had a mother somewhere in the world filled Dora with a sense of a joy that was sufficient in itself, and she used to lie awake nights and dream of the time when that wonderful mother would come and take her away, or perhaps call in the mid-term just to see her, as the other girls’ mothers sometimes did. But as the weeks and the months and the years rolled by and brought no realization of the dream, it died slowly down into the dead level of her daily life and was forgotten entirely—or if not actually forgotten, at least laid away, as children lay away the fables and the fairy tales of the nursery when they have grown too old to believe in them as possible things.

“There wasn’t any truth in it; it was all a ‘make-believe’ of Miss Skimmers, and I haven’t any mother at all,” she said to herself whenever the phantom of that dead hope came back to haunt her. “If I had, she would not have left me so utterly alone for all these years—it isn’t human. She will never come—I know it now—because she doesn’t

exist. I seem fated to pass my life enduring the cold insolence of brewers' daughters, like Gwen Morley, and the sneers of people like Miss Skimmers. I won't, however. I'll get out of it all, as soon as I am old enough to go away, and I'll earn my living and make a place for myself in the world, somehow."

That had been her determination months and months ago, she was thinking of it now as she sat, a dreary, shabby, spiritless figure, in the grounds of Miss Skimmers' "School for Young Ladies," and watched the tennis balls fly to and fro through the hot, still air of the summer afternoon.

The hot sun beating down upon her made her head ache, and the glare of the white dresses of the tennis players hurt her eyes; even the whistling of a thrush in a near-by tree seemed to irritate her to-day, and the loud laughter of the girls was positively maddening. But she kept on with the distasteful task of umpiring the match, and said never a word, until suddenly a shadow lengthened across the grass, fell upon her score book, and made her look up. Then she saw that one of the housemaids was standing beside her, and became conscious that the girl was saying something to her.

"You will have to get some one else to umpire for a time," she said, as she rose from her seat and laid the score book down beside Gwen Morley. "Miss Skimmers has sent word that she wants to see me at once."

She was unspeakably glad to get out of the heat and the blinding glare of the sun, and she walked away instantly, going straight to the cool, shadowy, little room where Miss Skimmers passed her hours of relaxation, and where the maid had told her that lady was waiting for her.

She opened the door and walked in—wondering the while what she was going to be taken to task for now; a summons to Miss Skimmers' presence usually meaning that. She was not at all surprised when she beheld that large plethoric female pacing the room in a state of violent excitement and wheezing like an asthmatical dragon.

"Shameful, I call it, Miss Vance!" she blurted out, without any preface, as

Dora came into the room. “After all the sacrifices I have made for you, after all the consideration I have shown you both! And in the middle of the term, too, without a word of notice or a chance to supply the vacancy”—her voice rising to a sort of shriek, as she flung her unwieldy body about the room. “Shameful, I call it; outrageous, I call it, and wanting in all respect, all decency, all consideration for me.”

“If you will tell me what all this is the prelude to, Miss Skimmers, perhaps I shall be able to understand what you mean,” said Dora, in that calm, low, reposeful voice, which was one of nature’s birth gifts to her, and which even fourteen years in the Skimmers’ establishment had not been able to destroy. “Will you tell me, please, what has happened and let me draw my own conclusions with regard to what you are pleased to term the ‘shamefulness’ of it; I suppose it has something to do with me, or you would not have sent for me.”

“It has everything to do with you,” cried Miss Skimmers, in what Dora, in unholy moments of secret mirth, was wont to call her “here’s your fine cauliflowers and nice fresh radishes” voice. “It has everything to do with you and with that inconsiderate person, your mother.”

“My mother? Let us leave that phantom out of the matter, Miss Skimmers. I am eighteen years of age—or I shall be in a month—and it is hardly complimentary to my intelligence to expect me to have faith in fairy tales now.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” said Miss Skimmers. “You were always a queer girl, and I never could understand you. I dare say that your mother is like you, or she wouldn’t be treating me in this shameful way and sending for you in the middle of the term and not giving me a moment’s notice to get some one to fill your place.”

Dora’s head swam and she staggered a little as though the heat had overcome her.

“My mother,” she said faintly. “You say that my mother has sent for—oh, Miss Skimmers, are you losing your senses or am I? My mother? Mine? She exists? And has sent for me? Oh, Miss Skimmers, is it really true?”

“Yes, it is; and very uncommon shabby of her I call it, too—sending for

you like this, and not giving me time to fill your place. Here's her letter, if you want to see it. She's stopping at a place called Minorca Villa, in Crumplesea, on the Kentish coast, and she writes that you're to go to her there at once, and not to delay a moment in starting. And here's a five-pound note she inclosed for you to get a new frock and to pay your railway ticket, and here's a card, too, with the address on it, 'Minorca Villa, Nightingale Road, Crumplesea, Kent.'"

Dora took both the letter and the card, read each—in a state of blissful excitement—and then took possession of the five-pound note.

"To think of my mother being a really existing person!" she said, with a happy little laugh. "Oh, Miss Skimmers, I can scarcely believe it. I shall go at once, at once."

She was as good as her word. Within the space of half an hour, she had packed her small belongings into a shabby valise—a relic of her "first-floor" days—sent them over to the railway station by a housemaid, said good-by to the house cat, her only friend and companion in the dreary days she was leaving behind her, and had shaken the dust of the Skimmers' establishment from her feet forever.

The day no longer seemed hot and suffocating, and the sun no longer hurt her eyes as she walked down the dusty, glaring, treeless road to the railway station—she was going to her mother, that poor, sorely tried, wonderful mother, who was an existent, after all, and whose poverty had kept them so long apart. For by some strange process of reasoning which was not compatible with the facts of the case, she had arrived at the conclusion that poverty was the sole explanation of her mother's long neglect of her.

"Poor little mother!" she thought, as she hurried out; "it took all she could spare to pay for my education, of course, and she could not afford to waste money in coming to see me. What a dear she is to have done so much! But never mind, I'll make it all up to you, and there will be two now to fight the battle, and as the proverb says, 'Many hands make light work.' I can teach music, and no end of things, and—you'll see!—it won't be long before I find pupils and am in a position to give you a nice little home and at least some of the comforts a lady should have."

For, of course, her mother was a lady; there could be no possible doubt of that, considering that in the old days she had had her affairs attended to by a family solicitor and was spoken of as a person of considerable importance—a lady in reduced circumstances, it is true, but still a lady. In her mind's eye, Dora could almost see her already—a sweet-faced, sweet-voiced motherly old lady with gray hair and mild eyes; a dear, soft-treading, soft-speaking, gentle old darling, with a tiny white cap on her head and such beautiful shapely old hands.

"How I shall love her; how I shall love her!" said the girl, with a little rush of happy tears; then she laughed aloud in her happiness, and, catching sight of the station at last, quickened her steps, until she was almost running when she finally entered it. Going up to the ticket office, she purchased her ticket.

"Have to change at Morecome Junction," said the clerk, in answer to her query; "and if you catch the connection, you ought to be at Crumplesea about six-forty. If you miss it, you'll have to stop at Morecome the night; there's no other trains to Crumplesea until the morning. Train for Morecome's coming in now.

"Number four platform—and you'll have to step lively if you want to catch it."

"Thank you," said Dora, as she gathered up her ticket and the change. In another moment, she was flying down the stairs to the train and to the beginning of the strange new life that lay before her.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE MEETING.

For once, in a way, fortune favored Dora. She managed to catch the connecting train at Morecome Junction, and, as a consequence, arrived at Crumplesea—tired and dusty, but still full of enthusiasm—at a quarter to seven that same evening.

It was the night of the opening of the Crumplesea Opera House, and she found the whole town placarded with gaudy posters of "The Beauty of Gotham"—glaring, highly colored things, depicting women with impossible tresses of an impossible shade of yellow, frisking about in skirts above their knees.

But in that first glance she had seen the name, "Miss Rosalind Montague-Vance," emblazoned over the boldest and the most conspicuous of them all, and she had felt an added shame because of that.

Not that she had any idea that the bearer of it could be in any way, even the remotest, connected with herself—for there were hundreds of "Vances" in the world; even Miss Skimmers having had more than one of them enrolled among her pupils in Dora's time—but that the knowledge of there being a woman bearing a name the same as her own, who could let her pictures be shown in public, made the shame of it seem a personal matter.

"How it must shock poor little mother, if she has seen it, too," she said to herself. "Fancy having one's name flaunted about by a creature like that, and in the very town where one lives! It must be awful."

The change of the five-pound note that had been sent her was still in her pocket—there had not been time to stop anywhere and buy the new frock she had been told to do—and hastily summoning a cabman to her aid, she gave him the necessary directions, and was soon speeding away to Minorca Villa with her shabby old valise on the top of

the vehicle.

Her destination was a rather shabby little brick house in a side street—there were such things as “apartments” to be had in Crumplesea, and all the available ones were engaged for Mr. Milton Dante’s company—and here at this flat-fronted, dejected-looking little building, Dora’s long journey from Miss Skimmers’ seat of learning came to an end.

“Come in, miss,” said the landlady—who opened the door in person. “The maid, she’s away—’aving been sent a’ errand by your sweet ma. You’re Miss Montague-Vance’s daughter, of course; anybody could see that at a glance, for you’re the livin’ image of ’er. ’Ere, Sarah! come and take the young lady’s luggage and carry it up to the room Miss Montague-Vance selected for ’er. Come in, miss; your sweet ma, she’s awaitin’ of yer—’aving but recent come back from a drive round the town with Mr. Bodwin, as owns the opera ’ouse, and Mr. Dante, as runs the company.”

All this was Greek to Dora. As a matter of fact, she hardly heard it, for her mind was in a whirl between settling with the cabman and realizing that she was now under the same roof with her unknown mother. She scarcely knew what was said or done, until she was led down a short and narrow passage, and the woman beside her was knocking at the door before which they both stood.

“The young lady, mum,” said the woman, as, in answer to a nonchalant, “Come in,” she turned the knob, and, letting a strong odor of Turkish cigarettes stream out into the passage, thrust open the door, “the young lady, mum, and I’m a-showin’ of ’er straight in like you asked.”

Dora waited for nothing more.

“Mother!” she said, with a little throb in her voice as she pressed past the landlady and entered the room, shutting the door behind her.

It seemed so holy, this meeting for the first time since infancy with the mother who had borne her! “It is I; it is Dora; it is——”

Here she stopped. The room was full of smoke, and through the dense aromatic cloud, she saw a figure curled up in a deep armchair beside a

table littered with papers, magazines, and cigarette ashes—a figure clad in a beautiful lace tea gown, and with a lovely, alluring face framed in a loose mass of disheveled wine-gold hair.

“Oh! I beg your pardon,” said Dora, coloring and instinctively fumbling for the knob of the door. “Such an absurd mistake. Pray forgive me; the fault was not mine. I expected to find my mother here.”

“Well, so you have done. If you are Dora—and what an absurdly big creature you have grown! I am your mother.”

“You? Absurd! Oh, pardon me, I don’t mean to be rude, but really this is too silly. You can’t be more than a year or two older than I am myself—and I am nearly eighteen years of age.”

“Nearly sixteen, please; I’ve told Dante that, and we may as well stick to it. It’s bad enough to have to confess that I’m old enough to have a daughter nearly sixteen, without adding two years to it, for the sake of truth. What in the world has made you grow like this? Of course, I know that your father was tall, but if I had thought that you were as big and as old-looking as you are, I don’t believe I should had have courage enough to send to that Skimmers woman for you—although I don’t know; it’s worth something to have a dig at your aunt! What are you staring at me like this for? For pity’s sake, sit down. Why didn’t you get a new dress? I sent money for you to do so. But perhaps the Skimmers woman didn’t give it to you? Did she? Why don’t you answer? I hate people who stare and say nothing. Sit down and talk to me, for goodness’ sake. I haven’t much time to waste with you, anyway; I’ve got to be off to the theater in a few minutes. I’m opening the new opera house to-night, you know—or, perhaps, you don’t know! But the town is well billed, and if you have any eyes at all you must have seen my name on the boardings.”

Dora drew back with a sudden influx of memory and with a shuddering sense of repulsion. “Oh, you don’t mean—you can’t mean that you—you are that woman? And that you are my mother as well?”

“Why can’t I mean it? Look here! that Skimmers woman hasn’t raised you like some Puritanical old granny, has she? I’m going to put you on the stage, you know, and have a ‘go’ at your spiteful aunt, in that way. She always treated her brother and me very shabbily. I don’t suppose

you ever heard much about your father? Well, he was the unfortunate stepbrother to the richest woman in this part of the country: Mrs. Charles Bonair. He's dead, by the way, so you won't be worried by him. Although I wrote her, she wouldn't give a farthing to me. Stingy old cat! I told her about you—oh, make no mistake about that—and I'll make her pay dear for what she has tried to do against me in this town. She would not let sleeping dogs lie, and now that she has waked 'em up, she'll have to pay the price for it, if I know myself."

Something that was like the pressure of a strong hand gripped Dora's throat. She did not speak; she could not—all strength, mental as well as physical, seemed somehow to have died within her, and, in a sort of collapse, she sank down on the edge of a convenient seat, and stared dumbly at the shining figure before her; a sense of shuddering repulsion biting into her soul and mirroring itself, in spite of her, in her fixed eyes. For, somehow, this woman, her newly found mother, reminded her of a snake curled up in rose leaves.

"Don't stare at me like that or I shall throw something at you, in a minute!" blazed wrathfully the object of her attention, reading that look and starting suddenly up in a temper. "I can see how it is: you hate me. No; don't trouble yourself to tell a polite lie—that sort of thing is wasted on me—and besides, the sentiment is reciprocated. I think I never saw a more ill-favored, unlovable creature in my life! It positively makes me ill to look at you, with your way of looking at people as though they were dirt beneath your feet. Upon my soul, I'm half inclined to send you back to where you came from and to have nothing more to do with you."

"I wish you would," said Dora impulsively. "It was a hard life at Miss Skimmers' but—I wish you would."

"Oh, do you? Well, I won't, then! I'm not the kind of person to invest in stocks and then tear up the certificates. I may be like a hen who has hatched out an eagle's egg, but—the eagle is of some use to me at present, and I'm not going to have it kicked out of the nest, simply because it desires that sort of thing. I've made all my arrangements with Milt Dante, and I'm going to put you on the stage."

"No, never!" said Dora, finding her voice suddenly. "I don't want to go on

the stage; I prefer to be as I am."

"Oh, do you? Well, perhaps you haven't any voice in the matter. You are under age, and I am your legal guardian, and it strikes me that you are going to do as you are bid, whether it meets with your approval or not. I've made all arrangements with Mr. Dante, and you are going to appear here—in this very town—to-morrow night, and are going to be 'featured' on the bill as 'Miss Vance, the niece of Mrs. Charles Bonair, of Thetford Towers,' and you are going, in that character, to lead the March of the Amazons and to wear as little as the law allows in the way of dress."

"I will never do it!" said Dora, starting to her feet, her whole body shaking and her cheeks aflame, as she thought of the "ladies" she had seen on the posters. "I don't know whether you have told the truth or not about my being the daughter of a gentleman, but—I will never do a thing like that. I will run away first."

The figure in the chair rose unsteadily, in a froth of lace and a billow of roseate silk, and laughingly drained out the last drop from a champagne bottle on the table and drank it.

"You won't get the chance to run away," she said, "I shall keep you under my own eye until then. You will go with me to the theater to-night, and I will put you under Milt Dante's care whenever I am obliged to leave you. As for your appearing on the stage to-morrow night, you'll do that if I have to chloroform you and have you carried on. I'll pay that woman for trying to shut me out of Crumplesea, make no mistake about that. Now, come and help me dress; it's time I was off to the theater, and that fool of a Bodwin will be round here with his carriage presently, to drive me there."

CHAPTER XLV.

A VIXEN.

What Mr. Milton Dante's advance agent had predicted came to pass. Miss Montague-Vance's triumph was absolute before the curtain had fallen upon the first act of "The Beauty of Gotham," and by the time the first night's performance came to an end, all Crumplesea—all masculine Crumplesea, that is to say—was, metaphorically, at her feet.

Whatever she might be off the stage, there was no gainsaying the fact that on it, hers was an alluring, lovely personality, and that her beautiful face, and her soft dovelike eyes seemed created to make men lose their heads and their hearts, and to become absolutely insane over her. She could sing, too—not merely carry a tune and let the orchestra furnish all the music, as so many of her kind do, but sing intelligently, sweetly, and with a voice that showed cultivation as well as the melody which had been put into it by nature—and as she exerted herself that night as none of her colleagues had ever known her to do before, it is scarcely to be wondered that she carried everything before her, and that the reception accorded to her by delighted Crumplesea partook of the nature of an ovation.

In all the crowd that filled the new opera house and cheered and shouted over her success, there was perhaps only one person—Dora—who did not delight in her triumph.

Seated in a proscenium box under the watchful eye and the close guardianship of Mr. Milton Dante, the girl, dumb with shame, and heartsick with despair, remained all the evening with her eyes cast down, and never, even once, looked toward the stage. It was a relief to her when the thing was over, and she was out in the cool night air again, driving back to Minorca Villa, with Mr. Milton Dante on one side of her, Mrs. Skivers—the wardrobe woman of the company, who had been told to look after her in future and to share her room at the villa—on the other, and her mother on the box with Mr. Bodwin, chattering and

laughing as they drove home through the fragrant sea-scented darkness.

It was close to midnight when they came clattering up to Minorca Villa, to find the landlady—whose palm had been rubbed with the magic ointment of gold beforehand—awaiting them and a tempting little supper on the table.

“How sweet of you, dear Mrs. Burners,” said the siren of the evening, as she jumped down and led the way into the house. “I am positively famished. Are Miss Dora’s rooms ready? Thank you; she won’t sit up to-night, I fancy.”

“No, nor any other night,” supplemented Dora herself, in a low, firm voice. “I have made up my mind that I will never do what you wish me to do, and you may as well know that now as later. Let me go away; let me go back to Miss Skimmers. I tell you I will never do that thing, never while there is breath in my body.”

“Oh, are you going to begin on that strain again? Take her up to bed, Mrs. Skivers, and come down after she’s safely tucked in—and locked in, too, mind—and chaperon me! One has to make some concession to that awful British personage, Mrs. Grundy, you know.” And then with an airy wave of the hand, she passed into the room where the supper was spread, leaving Dora to trudge wearily and dejectedly up the stairs, in company with Mrs. Skivers.

“A glass of champagne and a cigarette, somebody! I feel like an eagle that has been shut up for hours in a cage. Milt, don’t stop to carve that chicken, when you must know that I’m on fire with impatience to hear if you have done what I told you?”

“About sending the wire to Mrs. Bonair, you mean? Oh, yes, I attended to that, all right. But not exactly in the manner we first planned it. Hasn’t Mr. Bodwin told you?”

“Told me? He’s told me nothing. How could he, with that stupid girl with us the whole time? What has been done? What was amiss with the original scheme?”

“Mr. Bodwin didn’t think it would work. He fancied Mrs. Bonair wouldn’t take any notice of it, so to make sure, he drove over to the next town, and as he knows the name of Mrs. Bonair’s lawyer, he hired a man to go over by trap to Morecome Junction and wire back this:

“‘Have missed connection, and am coming down by hired conveyance. Look for me. Must see you to-night on a matter of life and death.

“‘HAZLITT.’

“That will keep her up no matter how late the hour is, and she will see you when you go.”

“As she wouldn’t, I am convinced, dear Miss Montague, if you acted on your original plan,” put in Mr. Bodwin. “I don’t mind telling you that I owe her a grudge for trying to ruin the opening of the opera house; and besides, I—I would do anything in the world for you.”

“What a dear you are,” she said, with a laugh, and one of her arch glances. “You shall take me for a ride to-morrow for that, and I will take care that our dear, sweet friend never finds out that you had anything to do with this business. Now another glass to the success of the venture, Milt, and then away we go! Show her claws to me, will she, the cat? Look here! there will be some fur flying to-night, unless I’m out in my reckoning.”

The second glass of champagne was poured out and drained, but—the start was not yet; for just then Mrs. Skivers reappeared upon the scene with word that she had seen Dora up to her room and locked her in, and there had to be a third glass in consequence.

“Stop here, Mrs. Skivers, and wait for us,” said Rosalind, when she finally rose and let Mr. Bodwin again wrap her in the long cloak she had discarded on entering. “I’m going for a short drive with the gentlemen. You’ll find plenty to eat and drink, but mind you, don’t take too much for your own good.”

“I’ll look out for that,” said Dante, as he slid an unopened bottle into each pocket of his coat and took possession of three clean glasses.

“‘Lead on; I follow thee.’”

Outside, Mr. Bodwin's private carriage still stood waiting. They trooped out and got into it and went skimming off through the darkness again.

Crumplesea was like a cemetery now, so still and black and lifeless it was. They scudded through it and whirled out upon the cliffs, with the sea droning and curling long zigzag lines of froth far down below them, and the moonless sky stretching velvet-dark above.

For twenty minutes or so they drove along with the wind in their faces, the blown salt scent of the sea in their nostrils; then the carriage swung suddenly round a curve that took it inland, bowled along a quiet road hedged with brambles and overhung with trees, and, whirling at length out of this, came full upon an immense double row of oaks leading up to a building set in the midst of a sort of park.

What it was like, this building, the darkness made it impossible to ascertain with any degree of certainty, but in the lower windows of it lights were burning and gave vague glimpses of a long, broad veranda curtained with flowering vines and of a stone-railed terrace dotted at regular intervals with urns that were full of flowers.

"Here we are; this is Thetford Towers," said Mr. Bodwin, in a whisper. But before he could say more, a flash of nearer light revealed the presence of a lodge—half lost in a wilderness of vines—and of a man looming out to open the gates.

"It's you at last, sir," the man said, as he made everything ready for the vehicle to enter the grounds. "Mrs. Bonair has been watching for you this long time, sir. I think you'll find her in the veranda, sir. It's an uncommon hot night, and she is a rare one for fresh air, as no doubt you know."

"Well, she will get something more than 'fresh air' in this case," said Rosalind, with a soft, low laugh, as the carriage swept by and bowled up the broad driveway to the house. "Fancy the old cat living in such luxury as this and never giving a farthing piece to me. You wait! I'll make her pay dear for it! She shall pour out sacks of money to me before to-morrow night, or I'll disgrace her so that she'll never show her face in public again. Look, will you? Look! There's somebody walking up and down that terrace, and it's a woman, I can see her passing by those

lighted windows."

"'S-h-h-! it's Mrs. Bonair herself," whispered Mr. Bodwin. "I've seen her too many years to be mistaken in her. My dear, if you wouldn't mind my stopping here——"

"Of course, I don't. Didn't I say you shouldn't be known in the affair? Stop at once and let me go on alone. Milt, if there's another glassful left in that bottle I'll take it."

"Better not, Rose; you've had enough, I'm thinking."

"Never mind what you are 'thinking,' I'm the best judge of what I want. A fresh glassful and a fresh cigarette, please; I'm going to interview my sister-in-law. Thank you so much! Here's health and prosperity to all of us. And now—for trouble."

Speaking, she scrambled down from the vehicle—a little unsteadily, as both Mr. Bodwin and Mr. Dante observed—and, cigarette in mouth, ran jauntily up to the veranda.

"Good evening, my dear," she said, as she skipped airily into the veranda and confronted Mrs. Bonair. "You needn't wait any longer for Mr. Hazlitt, because he hasn't the slightest knowledge of the wire that was sent you, and I dare say that he has been in bed and asleep for hours. Need I introduce myself?"

Berry turned quickly, and faced her visitor. There was a brief pause; then she answered with cold, calm, scornful dignity:

"No, that is not in the least necessary. But you may tell me, if you wish, why you presume to come here."

"I have come to either open your precious moneybags or to make you pay dearly for trying to shut me out of Crumplesea."

Berry gave a sort of faint gasp—so low that it was scarcely audible—then pulled herself together and tapped on the pane of the nearest window.

"Thompson," she said imperatively; "Thompson, come out here at once and take this creature away."

CHAPTER XLVI.

A LAST DECISION.

Rosalind's insolent face went red with wrath.

"I don't know who 'Thompson' is or whether it's a man or a woman," she said threateningly, "but it will be a bad night's business for both of you, if either he or she tries anything of that sort. I've some friends within call, and if I can't take care of myself without them, I've only to call, to get all the help I need."

Berry looked the unutterable disgust she felt, and she involuntarily drew back a step from her unwelcome visitor. Fortunately for all concerned, however, Thompson—who was one of the under footmen—was in another part of the house at the time and did not, therefore, put in an appearance in response to her ladyship's request.

Rosalind waited for a moment in expectation of hostilities of a more formidable character than the mere resentment of an indignant gentlewoman, and, finding that none were likely to come, stuck her cigarette between her lips again and blew out a long writhing plume of smoke.

"I reckon that 'Thompson' knows when he's well off, and has made himself scarce," she said with a laugh and a wave of one very much bejeweled hand. "And as there's no way for you to get into the house unless I choose to step aside and let you, I also reckon you've got to stand and face the music whether you like it or not. Turn about's fair play the world over. You tried to shut me out of Crumplesea, and now I'm shutting you in—in your own veranda."

"What do you want of me, that you have had the impudence to come here and to play me such a trick as you have done?" asked Berry, with cool scorn. "No! don't come any nearer; keep your distance, please; you are quite too close for comfort as it is."

"Oh! you want to know what I've come for, do you? Well, you shall—and

in short order, too! Yes, and you'll dance to a more expensive tune than I first intended for treating me like this. Ten thousand would have bought me off when first I came, but it'll cost you fifty thousand now, I promise you."

"There's a mistake on your part—it won't cost me a penny. If you have any idea of blackmailing me because you are—well, what you are, get that idea out of your mind at once. That my stepbrother married a creature who was—and apparently still is—scarcely a fit associate for one of my scullery maids and that I disowned him for it, are matters that are known to every one who knows me, and I should scarcely be likely to pay you money to keep secret a thing that is public property."

"Oh! that's the 'tack' you're going on, is it? Well, suppose I start in telling something that everybody doesn't know—not even you yourself—what then? Look here, my Lady High and Mighty, you snuffed me out as a wife and widow, but you can't snuff me out as a mother—the mother of your brother's daughter, a child born in honorable wedlock nearly eighteen years ago."

Save that it grew perhaps the fraction of a shade paler, Berry's face changed not one whit.

She flung away her cigarette and fumbled for a moment among the folds of her skirt, then her unsteady hand drew a packet of paper from her pocket, loosened the bit of string that held it together, and flirted off two documents from the top.

"There's her baptismal certificate, for one, and my marriage lines, for another," she said, "and here's one of Adrian's letters to me acknowledging that he knew there was going to be a child. Solid evidence that, isn't it?"

"Certainly; indisputable evidence. But again—quite unnecessary! Why all this palaver? I really don't see what you are driving at. Neither I, nor my husband, nor any one else, ever doubted your announcement, years ago. We simply had no interest in the matter. What is your intention?"

"Now look here: here's what is going to happen to-morrow night, if you don't buy me off at my own price, and take that girl off my hands."

Speaking, she unfolded the last of the papers she held, filling the air as she did so with the faint, sickly smell of fresh printer's ink, and shook out a still damp half-sheet poster.

Berry did not notice it for a moment; she had taken up the baptismal certificate and the faded letter. But she turned at last and saw the bill that was held up for her inspection. And for the first time her face became really pale.

"Looks nice, doesn't it?" said Rosalind, with a little babble of splenetic mockery. "Your niece is going to lead the Amazon march, and—in tights! She says she won't, but she will, you know; she'll have to give in—people always have to do that where I'm concerned. You'll do it presently, like all the rest, and I shall leave this place with your check for fifty thousand pounds in my pocket or else these bills go up to-morrow morning, and what's printed on them will happen to-morrow night. It doesn't do to run foul of me, does it, now?"

"I don't know," said Berry, in a low, level voice; "and I really don't think that I care, either. If you have set your mind upon doing this thing, you must do it, of course. And now, if you have said all that you have to say, be good enough to relieve me of your presence. You cannot extort one copper out of me, madam, no matter what you propose to do."

CHAPTER XLVII.

A VAIN THREAT.

"What!" she said, in a loud, aggressive voice, "you'll let this thing go on? You'll let your brother's daughter be put on the stage and made a spectacle of, and you won't pay me my price to prevent it?"

"I will not pay you one penny—no, not even one farthing—to prevent that or any other piece of blackguardism you may contemplate committing. The girl is nothing to me, less than nothing since she is your daughter. Do what you please with her; it is a matter of perfect indifference to me, but I warn you that if you take liberties with my name in the manner you propose to do, it will be actionable, and I shall instruct my lawyer to prosecute."

For one moment Rosalind stood irresolute, rage tearing at her like a ravenous wolf and the fumes of the wine she had drank mounting higher and higher until her head swam. Then, of a sudden, she lurched away from the rail of the veranda and leaped forward like a cat springing at a mouse, her two hands reaching out and shutting upon Berry's throat.

"You're a pig, you're a stingy, spiteful, vicious old pig!" she said, as she shook her with all her strength. "I'll make you suffer for this! I will, as I'm a living woman! Those bills go up in the morning—do you hear me? and you can send some one to Crumplesea Opera House to-morrow night, if you think I'm afraid of your threats of prosecution and won't disgrace your name as I said I would. Defy me, will you? You'll see what it costs, you'll see, you'll see!"

And here, with one final shake, she pushed from her, and scudded out of the veranda and ran dizzily down the path to the waiting vehicle.

Mr. Bodwin and Mr. Milton Dante, who were anxiously awaiting her return, saw her the very instant she appeared.

"I say! it is really you at last," said Mr. Dante, as she came reeling up to

the vehicle. “We began to think you were never coming, and——Hello! what’s up? You look as though you were in a dickens of a temper. Has the old girl been using you roughly, and wouldn’t she pay the price, after all?”

“She wouldn’t pay any price, even a farthing’s worth!”

“You don’t mean to say that she intends to let it go on?”

“Never mind what I intend to say, I’ll tell you in time enough. Turn the horse round a bit, the wheel is in the way of the step and I want to get in. What’s the matter with you two? Don’t you know how to manage a horse? You keep the thing prancing about so much I can’t get on the step.”

“It—it’s not me, Miss Vance,” declared Mr. Bodwin; “it’s you; you’re frightening it by rattling that bell and slipping off the step so often, and it simply won’t stand still!”

“Oh! it won’t, eh? Thinks it can play tricks on me like every one else this evening, does it? I’ll show it—the beast!”

Her temper was up now in real earnest.

She lurched away from the side of the vehicle after still another futile effort to keep her foothold upon the step, and by the time the two men divined her intention she was halfway to the horse’s head.

“Stop!” screeched out Mr. Milton Dante.

“Miss Vance, for Heaven’s sake!” began Mr. Bodwin; but both cries fell upon deaf ears.

Blind with rage and maddened with drink, she rushed at the horse’s head, caught at the bridle with one hand, and with the other struck it full in the face.

“Defy me, will you, you beast?” she began, and then—spoke never again!

The reins that Mr. Bodwin was holding slackened suddenly and curved in a loop between his knees for one instant before they drew taut again;

the horse reared in terror, an awful figure in the dark of the night, over the small slight shape which for two seconds stood erect in the pathway, then came a thud of descending hoofs and a little bleat of agony, and in the winking of an eye men and vehicle were being whirled off through the darkness by a runaway horse, and all that was mortal of the woman whose loveliness had charmed all Crumplesea to-night lay huddled up in the dust with one arm twisted under it and its skull crushed in like an eggshell.

On the following day, Berry—who had lain awake all night, wondering what she ought to do, and finally resolving to find her niece and save her from the disgrace that threatened her—lost no time in tracing the unhappy girl.

To her surprise, she was charmed with her niece, after only an hour's talk with Dora. Childless herself, and loving children dearly, Berry welcomed Dora to her heart and home; and when Charles returned from America, he, too, rejoiced in Berry's happiness.

Thus Dora found in Berry a mother who deserved and won her love, and in Charles a kind father, to take the place of one whom she had never known.

THE END.