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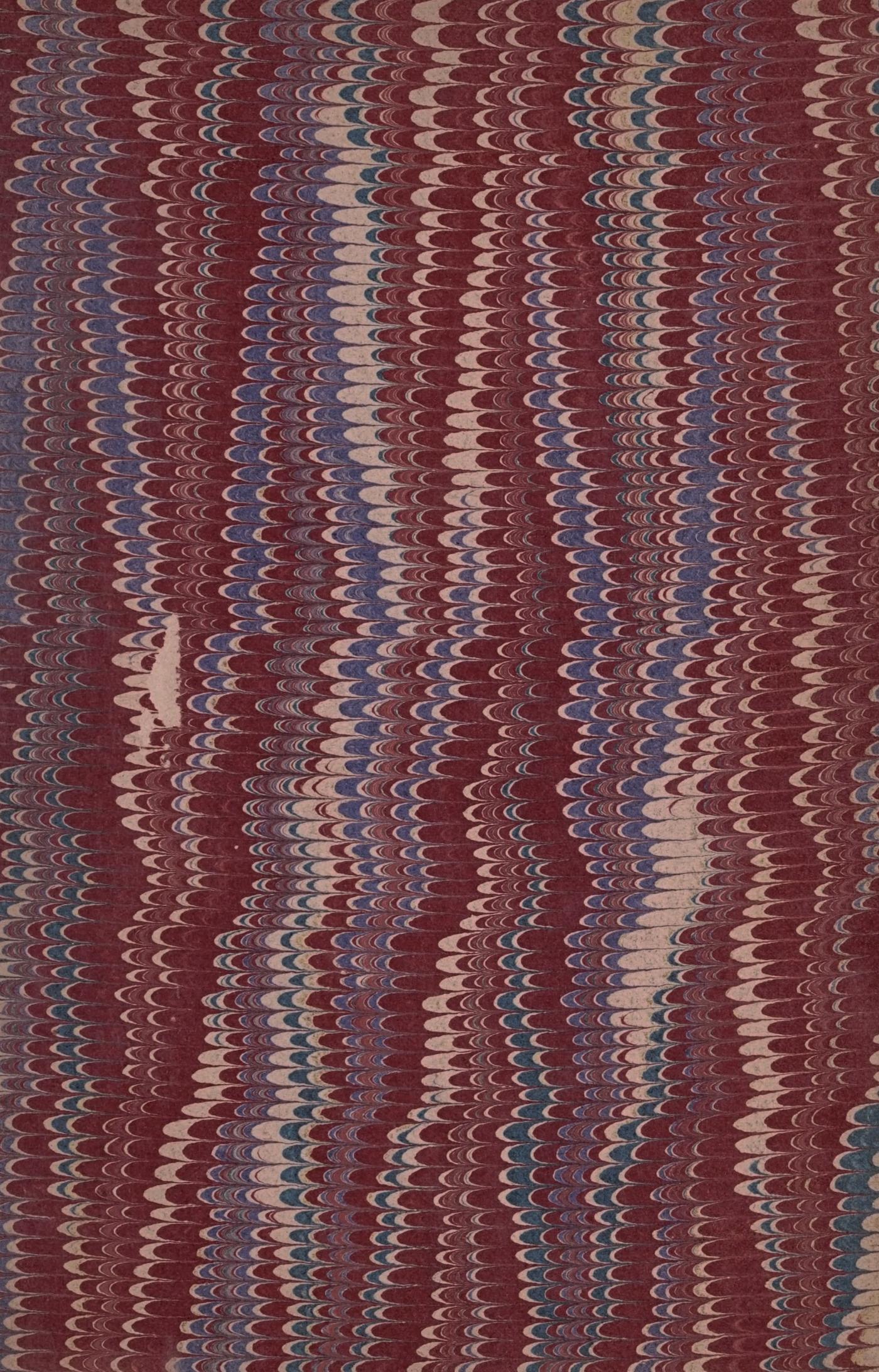
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AN ADIRONDACK STORY.

By JEAN KATE LUDLUM.

ILLUSTRATED BY WARREN B. DAVIS.



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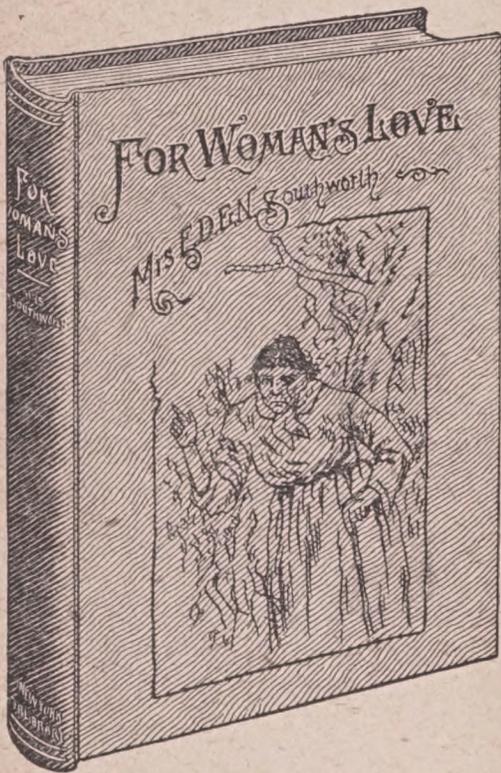
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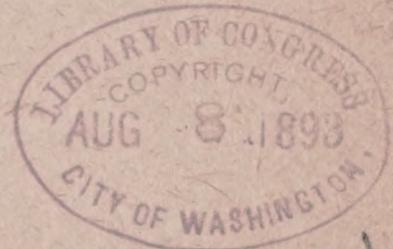
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PRESS OF
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UNDER OATH.

CHAPTER I.

TWO TO ONE.



ALT!"

The horse paused involuntarily, and fell back upon his haunches. His rider sat erect and defiant, a flush of anger visible on his handsome face, even in the darkness of the wooded road. He bit his lip savagely, and then demanded, a flash in his eyes like a danger signal:

“What do you want, sirs? How dare you stop a traveler like this?”

Two men held the bridle close to the horse's mouth. They held, also, each a revolver, set in a deadly aim upon the man eyeing them so fiercely, though he knew as well as they that he was at their mercy. His rifle, revolver and hunting-knife were comfortably packed at the bottom of his trunk, and his trunk was still at the station in the village he had left. He had no means of defense; he was not fool enough to attempt a hand-to-hand struggle with those ugly weapons in such close proximity; he was not coward enough to plead for his life, and he cursed himself inwardly for having been such an idiot as to ride that road at that hour, without a weapon of some sort.

One of the men laughed at this speech of his. Both wore half-masks on their faces, and were powerfully built; they were, evidently, used to a rough life; they would, doubtless, think but twice of murdering him, should there be need.

"Come, cap'n!" this man said, shortly; "you may's well do as we tell you. We're used to bein' obeyed! It's dark enough in all conscience. If you was fool enough to come along this road 'thout being prepared for us, we can't



EDITH.

help it! Mebby, too, it's as well you ain't, for two to one is pretty certain to win. Give up your rein, now: Oh, you may's well do it!" a scornful snort breaking his speech, as he jerked the rein to loosen the rider's hold. "I'll lead you safe enough, an' my comrade 'll see 't you don't make no trouble for us."

The other muttered some reply, which the rider could not distinguish; neither could he detect what sort of a voice this man's might be. His ears were alert for sounds that might betray his assailants at some future time; though, and he laughed rather desperately at the thought, he might never have the way to follow up any clew, no matter how clear it might be! How could he know what the end of this adventure might be? He had money in his pockets, but not enough to warrant such proceedings as this, and when they had taken such as they could find, might they not murder him out of pure revenge for the little gained? He was no coward, but such an ending to his journey was not pleasant to consider. Then, too—and his heart throbbed fiercely at this new thought—what would Edith say? What would Edith

think if he never came to her ; never sent her any message ; never again entered her life ?

It was not a pleasant thought, but he shut his teeth over any word, and yielded the rein to his captors, as he knew, and was wise in acknowledging that he was in their power, and the less he angered them the more likely he was to escape their vengeance.

“Oh,” said the big, burly fellow on his right, who had so far done all the talking, and was now dimly to be seen shrugging his broad shoulders as he slipped the bridle over his wrist and started along the constantly darkening road, his companion following just at the rider’s girth with that murderous revolver ready for instant use, should there be need. “You give in, do you, cap’n? Mebby it’s as well for you ! I don’t s’pose you’re special afraid fer your life, but its more philosophical to take things as you find ’em !”

He laughed, and then they fell into silence. No sound was to be heard, save the tread of the horse’s hoofs and the heavy-booted heels of the men as they tramped steadily on through the ever-deepening darkness, the horse occasionally

champing at his bit or jerking his head, as though to clear himself and his rider from the dangerous grasp into which they had fallen.

Allan Mansfield had plenty of time for thought, as he was led he knew not whither. Dense woods were on either side of the road, and the twilight upon the level open behind him was displaced here by deepest shadows. He began to call himself a fool to have ventured along the road at that hour. He should have remained at Saranac Lake, instead of attempting to reach Placid that night. He had missed the Placid stage, and the liveryman of whom the animal was hired warned him against attempting to ride the lonely ten miles between the two villages. He laughed at the time. He bit his lip, remembering how cowardly he had thought the fellow for this warning. As though double ten lonely miles could dismay him, when he had promised to be at Placid that day!

Now he could see the folly of it. He was a stranger to the road, save as he had ridden it the previous summer in company with others. It was a plain road enough in the light of day, but, at that hour and alone, it was not the most desir-

able of roads to travel. He might as well be among the Spanish banditti, as in the hands of such men as these, with whom he had fallen.

What their object was, he could not of course tell to a certainty. They had made no mention of robbery. They would not hesitate to use those revolvers, he was pretty certain, but they did not shoot him down at once, as they should have done, if murder were their only object. So far as he could remember, he had made no man's ill-will during his stay in that region the previous summer. He treated the guides with the heartiest good-will; they had seemed all to be ready at his slightest wish. Yet here these two men had risen from the roadside under the cover of overhanging woods, and each, with a hand on his bridle-rein and a revolver pointed with unflinching aim at him, had demanded that he do as they should bid.

He could not comprehend it. He had plenty of time to turn the matter over and over during the silent ride through the darkness.

They kept to the road for some distance. The thick woods on either side overshadowed the road, and the rough traveling caused the horse

to stumble now and then, but the men did not once waver as to their course. They kept to the road for some distance, and then, without a word passing between them, turned the horse's head aside, and led the way through an open bar-way to the wood path beyond, pausing to replace the bars; and then marched on as silently and mysteriously as before.

Allan Mansfield kept his eyes open and on the lookout. He could make no objection to any road they might choose. He did not know their intention, but there was no reason why he should not be on the watch for anything that might be of help to him, should there be hope of such. There was not a drop of cowardly blood in his veins, and he had passed through many a dangerous adventure ere that, but none, he acknowledged reluctantly, so strange as this.

The road had been dark enough, but within the wood, the shadows melted into one, and lay over the world around him like a heavy pall, save here and there when an occasional streak of light struck through the heavy boughs.

On and on they went, with no break in the silence save the tread of horse and men or the

rustling of boughs as they brushed them in passing. On and on and on! Allan wondered, if they were to travel the night through, and if ever he should escape, how he could discover the way out of this labyrinth of darkness and boughs. The sound of a brook bubbling through the darkness fell upon his ear. They crossed it, splashing the water, and went on still, dark as the darkness, mysteriously and unfalteringly. There could be no doubt that his guides knew every step of the way they were going. No one but one well accustomed to the road could have followed a course so accurately or so unfalteringly as they.

No words passed between the two masked men. They knew, apparently, the work for each to do. But there was no chance of escape there.

Those eyes behind the masks were alert, as well as his. The slightest movement would rouse suspicion on their part, and the bridle-rein would tighten on the horse's mouth, and the cold muzzle of the revolver in the hand of the man at the saddle-girth against his cheek was certain to follow. He tried it once. He gave up all hope of

that, then. He must wait and let fortune, if she would, bring him safely through; otherwise—

He shrugged his shoulders. It was his own foolhardiness that had brought him into the trap; he, and he alone, must suffer the consequences. But was it he alone who would suffer from the consequences? His cheek grew hot as the thought followed upon the other. What would Edith say, and what would she think? And his mother, whom he left so few hours before—what would she think if he never returned to her, was never again heard of? Foul play they would say, of course; but there would be the uncertainty and the utter impossibility of ever discovering the truth.

To be sure, he had no claim upon Edith, and that savage biting of the lip continued as he followed the thoughts; but he was sure of his own heart, and he must be sure of hers when the opportunity should be given him, or he could make it for himself! He had decided that question on his way up on the train. That summer should not pass, as the previous summer passed, without bringing him some definite reply to the

question that had troubled him for so long he could not tell just when it did begin.

But they went on through the darkness, winding in and out, it seemed to him, as well as he could judge, unable to see the way; and there was no movement of halting, no offer of conversation, or solution of the mystery so suddenly laid around him. If only he had brought his revolver, or even his hunting-knife. But no; here he was, utterly defenseless, and at the mercy of how deep villains he did not know.

They passed on and on and on. No lighting of the darkness of the wood, no hint of any end to the file upon file of trees before, behind and around them in the heart of that Adirondack forest! He could do nothing, he could say nothing and know nothing till the time should come when they themselves—his captors—chose to enlighten him. It was mysterious and awful in its very mystery! Never before had he heard of any band of outlaws in the woods of that region. Not within the past few years. Perhaps in the old days there were many and many a band of this sort; but this experience of his own was the first hint he had received of such things in the

enlightened generation in which it was his lot to be born!

He sat erect in the saddle; he would not have them think he felt little fear of them. He was a man unarmed, defenseless, at their mercy, but he was still a man.

CHAPTER II.

WHO IS THIS WOMAN?

They paused suddenly. There was no opening, no end to the route evidently, so far as Allan Mansfield could see; but his strange guides stopped, not with the uncertainty of those who knew not or were uncertain of their road, but as though this were the end of their way. All was darkness. Not a ray of light anywhere, look as one would— No, stay! Was that a light yonder where the darkness had seemed so dense but the moment before? The shadows were so deep that there was not visible any object to make it darker, but this square of light proved that there

must be some building at hand with a light within. Whether a house or an inn, or a shed as the rendezvous of thieves and murderers, he could not tell. He would know soon enough.

The man at the bridle-rein evidently had no doubt of his vicinity, for he still kept his hold upon the rein as he stepped forward, and struck with the butt of his revolver what must be the door of a dwelling. There was no immediate response, and a muttered curse escaped his lips as once more he knocked, this time with considerable violence. The door opened then, and a woman appeared, shielding her eyes with one hand from the darkness, the soft lamplight at her back showing the slender, graceful outlines of her form.

The man swore at her in an undertone, as he pushed with his boot the door wider open, and then turned to the young man still in the saddle.

“It’s time you got down outen that!” he said, in a gruff voice, not the free and easy bravado of the road he had previously used toward his prisoner. “This is yer destination till sech time as we think it’s best for you to skeedaddle! Didn’t

think you'd light into no sech hotel, did ye, when ye lit outen ther town yonder?"

He laughed roughly at his coarse joke, and eyed the young man as he threw one leg lightly over the saddle-bow and sprang down to the ground.

Anything almost was preferable to that silent, mysterious ride through the darkness. Reality was better than apprehension. The appearance of the woman in the doorway gave him hope. There could not be utter deviltry there if a woman was among them. He had such faith in women since he had known Edith Hallston.

"Take the critter away, Bill!" the rough man said, as he preceded the other into the house, though the other knew full well he must follow. "Ye can set down in hyar for awhile," he added to Allan, as he strode through the room toward a door beyond. "An' you can git us supper, my woman!" He turned in the doorway to deliver this message at the woman who had opened the door for them, and then vanished beyond, closing the door behind him. But Allan was not deceived. He was pretty certain there could no

words pass between himself and the woman but others would hear.

The woman placed a chair beside the fire of logs on the wide hearth, for the evening air of that woodland was cold, and motioned him to seat himself. She did not once lift her face full to the light, but the outline, as he could catch it in the uncertain light, was clear and delicate, though touched with an infinite sorrow. What was there in her life to leave such a trace upon such a face? Allan began to ponder this with the other thoughts, as he seated himself in the chair placed for him, burying his head in his hands for a moment in his utter dismay.

Alone, perhaps, in a den of robbers, and, worse, miles and miles from any assistance, utterly beyond the help of his brother-men. No cry of his could reach other ears than these. No call would sound further than the silent trees at most. His only hope was the presence of the woman. There was always some sort of sacredness in the presence of a woman. To just what class of outlaws his captors belonged he did not know, but there was this woman among them. He wondered if there were more

than the two he had met, and decided that such doubtless was the case. They were, perhaps, but two of a band of outlaws, with this house in the heart of the Adirondack forest as their rendezvous. Little hope for him, indeed. For, after all, what could a woman—and such a frail woman—do to help him! And Edith—

Harsh voices struck in upon his thoughts. The words were indistinguishable, but the tones were those of men in no gentle mood. A woman's voice, low and soft, but firm, mingled with the harsher tones. About what were they arguing? Not a word came to him. The voices rose or died for the moment in their argument, the men's voices growing momentarily harsher and more discordant, that of the woman still soft and low, but without a trace of faltering.

Allan Mansfield was no eavesdropper, but, with his life at stake, he had no hesitation in doing his best to catch what was passing in the next room. For what was the woman pleading? For what were the men so set? Curses mingled with the others. He could distinguish them. Once he caught the tingle of steel, as though a

knife were being sharpened. The color forsook his face. To be caught like a rat in a trap!

Then the voices ceased. Silence again fell upon the house as it lay upon the woods through which they had passed. The crackle of the fire or the falling of a loosened log were the only sounds to be heard through the room.

Presently the door through which the man and the woman had disappeared was opened, and the woman entered. Allan glanced closely at her, to read in her face, if possible, what was to befall him. Her face was pale, and there was a brilliancy in the eyes that made them larger and darker than before. The red lips must have once been sweet for kissing, but it may have been this life that had set the sternness upon them. She did not show any sign of emotion as she crossed the room after closing the door behind her.

She crossed the room quite calmly, and with a step light and full of life. Passing him, her dress brushed against his knee, and she glanced up with a slow parting of her lips, as though she would smile upon him, but stopped. A frightened look came into her eyes; new pallor spread

over her face. Then, ere he could comprehend this swift change in her demeanor, she turned away to the hearth, and, stooping, brushed the fire into a brisk blaze.

When this was done, and she had brushed up the flying cinders with the broom beside the hearth, she rose, and again passed from the room swiftly, as though fearful she might be detained.

Allan followed her with his eyes as she passed out, closing the door behind her. He wished, vaguely, that one or other of them would forget to close the door, that he might know what was passing outside. What new mystery was this that had touched the woman to such a show of fear? Or was it merely surprise, or a new thought of the murder to be done that night amid the silence and sacredness of the woods?

“I wish she'd come back!” Allan said to himself, leaning his elbow on the arm of the chair and his head in the hollow of his hand. Fear of unknown events gave place to astonishment. Why was the woman so moved when she looked in his face? At their entrance she

had not once looked up, and had not seen him. What was there in his face that had so struck the life from hers?

He glanced mechanically around the room, as though by so doing the mystery might be solved. Everything was in the most scrupulous neatness. The floor was bare, but shining with the use of soap and water, and clean sand was sprinkled upon it, adding to the quaint effect. There were no pictures on the walls; everything was blank and bare and staring white. Not a trace of adornment was in the room; nothing but the most perfect neatness and household care. The plain pine table in the middle of the room lacked a cover, but it was shining and white. The pine chairs were spotless, ranged along the wall as though there was a plenty of visitors to occupy them. There was no time-piece in the room. It was evidently the living-room, and Allan wondered at this lack of any clock. He took out his watch—a handsome watch it was, engraved, and set with one glittering diamond, with his mother's monogram upon it, for it was a gift to him from her—and discovered, with a start, that they had been

long upon their road through the woods, and it was close upon nine o'clock.

"It'll not be long before I know the worst anyway," he said to himself, grimly, as he closed the case and held the watch in his hand, as though it were the touch of a friend in that trying time. Then he sat still with his head in his hand and his eyes upon the fire, pondering his strange fate, and what the outcome was likely to be.

"They will like nothing better than to lay hold upon you," he said, his eyes upon the watch, turning it over that the jewel should flash in the firelight. "Mother had better have kept it than have given it to me before I left home, as she did. They will have to pretty well demolish it though, to dispose of it, for it would be easily traced. There is not another like it in the country."

It was in truth a beautiful thing. The jewel, flashing as he turned it in his hand, was of the purest quality; the gold was solid and of the finest. It was exquisitely engraved, and around the jewel, in the center enclosing the monogram, was a motto in tiny letters of rubies:

“Mizpah—the Lord watch between thee and me till we meet again.”

As Allan Mansfield sat so, his eyes upon the watch, the door opened noiselessly and the woman re-appeared, pausing for an instant upon the threshold. Instinctively following his gaze, her eyes fell upon the watch with its jewel flashing in the firelight. That deadly pallor that struck upon her face so mysteriously a few minutes previously, once more touched it with the look of death, and the eyes were strained and full of horror, as though there were some terrible thing close upon her, or one she loved. The red lips that should have been given to smiling parted in a ghastly fashion over the close-shut teeth crushing down upon them. She stretched out one hand, small and well formed it was, as though to steady herself against the door, and then she regained her self-control with a mighty effort, and shut the door entering the room.

Allan looked up as her step crunched upon the sanded floor, and something in her face

touched a chord of pity within him. For the moment he forgot himself, forgot the peril that surrounded him, as, replacing the watch in his pocket, he rose and went toward her, intense sympathy on his kindly face.

“You are ill?” he asked, gently, laying his hand upon her arm, his clear, brown eyes upon her agitated face. “Is there nothing I can do for you? A glass of water—”

She stopped further words by a gesture. She shrank from his touch upon her arm. She strove to recall the color to her face, but could not. There was something in her eyes that warned him she was no ordinary woman.

She motioned for him to again be seated, and instinctively he obeyed her. Her motions were quiet, but he knew she must be under some violent emotion. He watched her as she moved about the room preparing the table for supper. Her figure was slender, her step light, a something of nameless grace was about her. Allan watched her with considerable curiosity, for the time forgetting himself.

Presently she turned from the table, with its

neat arrangement for one, and crossing to him, steadied her voice, as she asked, softly :

“Do you mind telling me your name, sir? I do not ask from idle curiosity, believe me.”

He believed her. There was that air of unmistakable truth and purity about her that forbade unjust thought of her.

“Mansfield,” he replied, quietly, with a trace of hesitation in his manner. “Allan Mansfield. Is there anything I can do for you, madam?”

She shook her head, shutting those small, white teeth over the red lips. The expression in her eyes hurt him. They were like the eyes of a wounded animal—beautiful eyes, but a heart-pang in their depths.

“And your home?”

How wonderfully steady the voice was.

“I am from New York,” said Allan, unable to take his eyes from her face. There was something familiar in her face, though he could not, for the life of him, place where he had ever seen her.

“Were—were you alone, to-night?” Why should that terror come into her voice and face?

“Yes.” His eyes were alert. Had she a purpose in asking these questions? Perhaps she meant, if anything happened—

“But you came up from the lake?” she asked again. She would know, to the least detail, his plans. He smiled to himself at the thought, but felt there was more than mere idle curiosity in her questioning.

“I came up from the city on the afternoon train. The train was late—they tell me that is often the case.” He smiled here, though he lost none of his gravity. “I was on my way to Lake Placid. I had made my plans for remaining there for a couple of months. I have friends there. My mother was to have come, but was detained for a few days. She will come on later—”

“Then your mother did not come with you?” A flash of light appeared for an instant across her pallid face.

Allan looked at her in amazement. Was she insane? Why should it interest her whether or not his mother accompanied him, or even whether he had a mother at all?

“You will pardon me for these questions,”

said the soft, low, tremulous voice, as a sweetness and grace came into her manner. "I have not asked them from curiosity, as I told you. Perhaps, in the morning, I may be able to tell you why I have asked them. If not—" for a moment the low voice died out as though with horror at some thought at strife with her calmness—"if not, you will—you *must*—know that it was for the best and kindest motive they were asked! Will you come to supper?"

She turned from him with the steady step that characterized her movements, and drew up a chair to the table, waiting for him to follow. When he obeyed her, she left the room, presently returning with a plate of smoking ham and potatoes, with a daintily prepared egg, and coffee.

"Your ride was cold," she said, quietly, as she set the dishes upon the table before him. "The coffee will strengthen you. If you would be strong you will eat what I have set before you. Afterward I will show you your room."

She left the room as noiselessly as she had entered. Mansfield, in considerable bewilderment, but with the common-sense determination

to eat, as the woman had warned him, in case there might be need of strength, ate of what she had brought.

What did the woman mean, he asked himself, by her questions and agitation? Did she know of what was to take place during the stillness of the night, and were these things new to her? She was not a young woman, as that term is understood. Thirty-five years must have passed over her head at the least, though there was a grace and gentleness about her that would make her charming anywhere but in that den of thieves and murderers. What was it in her life that linked her to him? What was there in her face that awakened some old memory? He could not solve the problems as they rose and grew confused in his mind, and he soon laid aside the knife and fork, and leaned back in his chair, giving himself up to reverie.

In the midst of this sounded again the angry voices in discussion in the outer room, though now in more hushed tones and with that of the woman steady with some strange purpose. Then they died away, with a muttering now and then,

as though some fierce fire of anger were working, and the woman, calm, still, steady-voiced, appeared in the room, saying, in her unmoved manner:

“If you have done, sir, I will show you your room.”

He rose at once, and followed her, without a word of objection. It was in some other room, then, he was to be robbed and murdered!

His guide paused at the end of a long passage on the second floor, the small lamp she carried flaring as a gust of wind crept through a crack in the rafters above, and held out a key to him.

“Will you have your key, sir?”

There was some strange meaning in her voice, surely.

He shook his head, with a sudden determination to test her.

“No,” he said, quietly, his eyes upon her face keenly. “If they intend to murder me, they will get in anyhow. Why should I lock the door?”

The woman staggered for an instant, lifting her blanched face to his. Then she gathered her marvelous strength of will, and said, slowly but steadily:

“This is your light, sir. I trust your rest will be undisturbed.”

Turning swiftly, she disappeared along the passage, and her light feet upon the stairs proved to Allan that he was alone at the doorway of what might be his death-chamber, the light flickering and flaring fitfully out of the darkness around him.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE SOLEMN NIGHT.

Gathering courage in the midst of these strange happenings, Allan turned the handle of the door, and entered the room assigned him for the night, that might, for all he knew, be his last night upon earth. The lamp flickered in a most disheartening way, but it was better than no light, and of this he was fully aware. Glancing swiftly around the room, he found it cozy, and as cheerful as a small fire of logs upon the hearth could make it; but he was not in a specially cheerful mood, and

failed to fully appreciate the brightness of the room.

“It’s a devil of an adventure!” he muttered, as he set the lamp upon the stand at the right of the hearth, and stood staring about him in a mixed state of mind. “These little scenes are all very well in novels or upon the stage, but when it comes down to a fellow’s being pushed through the same hole himself in real life, it’s another thing. “Well,” he shrugged his shoulders, and lifted his brows in an attempt at bravado, “if the worst comes to the worst, all I can do is to make the best use I can of my muscles. They’re pretty tough and pretty good for such a scrimmage, and maybe can change the current of events.”

He ran his left hand up and down over the muscles of his right arm thoughtfully, still eyeing the quiet little room with its spirit of neatness upon everything.

“She’s a puzzle, though—that woman,” he added, knitting his brows and turning his gaze fiercely upon the friendly fire, that seemed to him to flame up in warning arms of rose, to tell him of what the night and the solemnity of the heart

of the Adirondacks held for him. "Why she should have taken it into her head to become so interested in my welfare is beyond my comprehension, though there is something about her that recalls something in my old life—only for the life of me I can't recall just what it is."

Still frowning heavily at the fire, he sat down in the chair drawn to one side of the hearth, near the stand with the lamp upon it, and drawing from an inner pocket a case of cigars, selected one, and, lighting it, leaned back, determined at least to make himself as comfortable as circumstances would permit, and so fortify himself against whatever might come upon him.

"Of course, I won't go to bed to-night," he said, in that grim tone that had come to him during the startling adventure of the evening. "I don't suppose I'll have a very fair fight if it comes to that, but at least I'll be on guard. 'An ounce of prevention—'"

He blew wreaths of smoke, one after another, around his head, and watched them floating up and up, to dissolve at last in a ghostly glimmer of past substance. He held the cigar between

his thumb and finger, his elbow on the chair-arm, and gazed into the red heart of the fire that flared up toward the sky at the top of the chimney.

Allan's thoughts drifted after the fire as it flaunted and flickered. What was there to hinder his escaping through the window? There could not be a long jump to the ground. The night was dark enough surely. He could not be seen. Even the keenest eyes could see nothing through that darkness. But if he should escape the house, how could he hope to escape the wilderness? Where would he find the path to lead to the road? And he could never hope to do this in any event without the horse.

Was it money they wanted, he asked himself. He hadn't enough with him to satisfy such a demand as they would be likely to enforce; besides, and he closed those determined teeth of his over the thought, once more setting the cigar between them, he had a good mind to refuse any sort of compromise. Should he grant any such demand, would it not give them license to attempt the same outrage upon

others? At the most, it was not likely that he was the first man they had made this attempt upon. It was evident they knew every foot of ground over which they had passed from the highway to the house. Their hiding-place would be almost undiscoverable, should any attempt be made to find them.

How the minutes and hours dragged. He stirred the fire and kept the blaze going to lighten the loneliness of the room. Every sound, no matter how infinitesimal, sounded startling through the quiet. Hark! He leaned forward, the better to catch any new sound that might mean danger. His ears were quick for sound.

Only a rat in the outer passage! A scattering of soft feet along the rickety boards; a squeal, as though of derisive laughter at man's magnificence!

Allan leaned back once more in his chair. He lighted another cigar. This was the third he had smoked. Still there was nothing to cause him more than one or two swift heart pulsations, as quick to pass away, as nothing came of them. He glanced at his watch; he had set it upon the

stand near him that its face might be a friend to him in the quiet room. Half-past twelve! Nothing new. Everything, save those small sounds of the night, as silent as the grave, and as peaceful. If only the morning would come! He was not a coward, but this waiting for some unknown danger was unbearable.

The lamp-light seemed fading. He stooped and examined for the cause, turning the wick up to the full height the chimney would bear. The oil was nearly gone; that was the cause of its failing. Presently he would be without light, save for that of the fire. Thank heaven, there was plenty of wood to keep the fire going the night through. He could not have borne the dead darkness of the room under his excited feelings.

There, the flame of the lamp flared up bluely, wavered, swung, as though struggling for even that pale life, and was gone.

Allan removed the cigar from between his teeth to mutter a malediction upon it.

He struck the log with his foot, and sent a shower of sparks up the chimney and out into the room. This set the fire to burning with

renewed brightness, until the room was quite as brilliant as when the lamp was lighted.

“They shall have the benefit of all the light I can give them, anyhow,” he said, savagely. He was getting into a bad temper. The loneliness and silence, together with the fatigues of his recent journey, were shaking his good-nature. It would be a hard struggle for any one attempting him harm, for his blood was up, and his muscles were strong as whip-cords.

“I almost wish they would come,” he said, presently, with renewed hostilities toward the fire. “I’m in as good a humor as I could wish, to meet all the robbers in the country, excepting that a good revolver loaded to the muzzle would not come amiss. But if the worst comes, they shall have a hard tussle.”

Silence again, and the crackling of the fire as it shot up the black chimney toward the free air. Not a sound on the air, save those small, mysterious night sounds along creaking boards and at ghostly crevices in the roof.

Two o’clock, and nothing yet happened. Allan was growing restless. He was intensely tired, but could no more have closed his eyes in slum-

ber than he could have discovered his path through the woods outside. No matter how weary he might be, he must watch and wait for treachery that boded its own time for action. He would not be murdered in his sleep, if he knew it. They should find him ready at any moment, should they care to try.

Three! Four! Another hour and daylight had made its way through the dense woods, and the heavily hanging boughs, and was bringing on its footsteps the golden light of another day's sunshine. Five o'clock! Six! And still Allan Mansfield was in the land of the living, and there had been no attempt upon his life so far as he was cognizant. To whom or what could he owe this escape from robbery or death? He had been prepared for either or both during that terrible night's vigil, and still, neither had come for his deciding.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HEART OF A WOMAN.

A light tap came to his door, and he crossed over to open it, fearing nothing now the sunlight and the day had come. The woman stood in the dark passage. She was very calm, but there were traces of some struggle upon her face. There were lines there that had not been there when she and Allan talked in the room below the previous evening.

“If you are ready, sir, be kind enough to come down at once,” she said, quietly. “Your breakfast is ready, and it is important for you to be ready to start as soon as possible.”

To start! They would take him to some other place then to finish their work. He need have had no fear for his life in the house. These were strange robbers, indeed. They gave lodging and board to their victims ere taking from them their property and life! A harsh laugh, born of his night's strain, crossed his lips, but

was instantly silenced as he caught the woman's eyes. Their expression was brave and steady, but they, too, showed the trace of some terrible battle during the night. What was this mystery?

The harsh laugh died into a slow, grave smile that set well upon the kind face, as he said, as quietly as she had spoken :

“I have been ready since last evening, madam. Shall I follow you at once?”

Again that frightened look in her eyes and the horror upon her face. Did she not know he could not fail to realize that this strange game of hide-and-seek must mean more than a mere night's lodging in the wilderness, brought in by force?

For answer she bent her head, and motioned, with one white hand, for him to follow.

He closed the door of his room, and followed her as she bade him. The passage was dark, and he did not wonder at those strange sounds of the night, when he saw the broken boards, and open rafters of the place. He shrugged his shoulders as his eyes took in the bare sight.

There was no sign of others about as they entered the door of the room where he had been brought the previous night, and where his supper was served and the woman had given that startling glimpse of mystery in her motives for questioning him. The table was cleanly spread, and there was a plain, though substantial meal, prepared as on the other occasion of his dining with his strange hostess. She beckoned him to be seated at once, scarcely granting him time to close the door from the stairway. She seemed in most extreme haste to have him gone. He smiled bitterly as he wondered where would be his next stopping-place, and if he would receive as remarkable a welcome as he had received in that house !

The woman was restless. She crossed to the fire-place and made a show of sweeping up the hearth. She started toward the opposite door through which Allan had caught the angry voices of the previous evening, and then turned back ere she reached it. She went to the one window at the front, and glanced out as though expecting some one.

Allan watched her with fascination. He

could not take his eyes from her for long. There was something so terrible upon her face that he could not doubt the night had been one of suffering to her. Not physical suffering, but a tumult of mind that made mere physical pain dwindle to nothing. That she had been in danger of her life might even be possible, but he could not determine what was the true cause of those new and intense lines upon the quiet, cold face.

“Pardon me,” he said presently, unable longer to keep silence. “You have been very kind to me, madam. Is there nothing I can do for you before I leave, to prove to you how much I appreciate this?”

For a moment she did not answer, and he began to doubt if she heard. She was standing at the window, her very figure proving that she was under severe mental strain, as though she would *feel* the approach of any other than themselves. Then she turned upon him, and her face had changed. It was pallid as the dead then; now it was flaming with color and her eyes were brilliant as stars. Her hands were fluttering with her excitement. She started toward him,

her lips apart to speak, but uttering no sound, as though her excitement were too much for her to master for the moment.

Allan rose instantly at sight of this change in her. He reached out his hands as though he feared she would fall, she was trembling so, and there was that wonderful light upon her face. But she raised her hands to keep him away, and then let them fall upon her breast, folded as one would fold the hands of the dead or the dying who would pray.

“Yes,” she said, and her voice was intense as her face, though quite under her control, her brilliant eyes looking into his. “Yes, sir; there is something you can do for me. Listen! Do you know why you were brought here last night? Do you know what would have happened but for me? You would have been murdered, you say? Yes!” Excitement was dawning in her voice, but she struggled to overcome it, and succeeded. “I have saved your life, sir! It was I pleaded with those men—beseeched them—yes, begged them upon my knees for your life. Why? That I will not tell you now. I have tried to bring myself to tell you, but I cannot do it now

when the time has come to tell. Let this satisfy you; I have saved your life. You go now—at once—from here in company with those who brought you, and on your own horse. You will be taken along the very path through which you rode last night. But you will never be able to discover this path by yourself to betray us, for you shall not. You shall be given your property and be left in precisely the same spot as that in which you were taken last night. Not a hand shall be laid upon you to your harm. But—”

She paused, and caught her breath, as though she were fighting with death, and her voice, when she again took up her conversation, was hoarse and unnatural.

“When you go away from here, you will neither be bound nor blindfolded, and every foot of the way is the same as you trod last night, but I defy you to discover this spot again, should you seek it forever. And the reason you will not find it, is this: Before you leave this room, before it is certain that your life is saved, there is an oath you must take from me, and keep it as sacredly as you would keep an oath to your mother or your God.”

She shivered, and for a moment covered her strained face with her trembling hands. When she looked up, the old, haggard expression was upon her face.

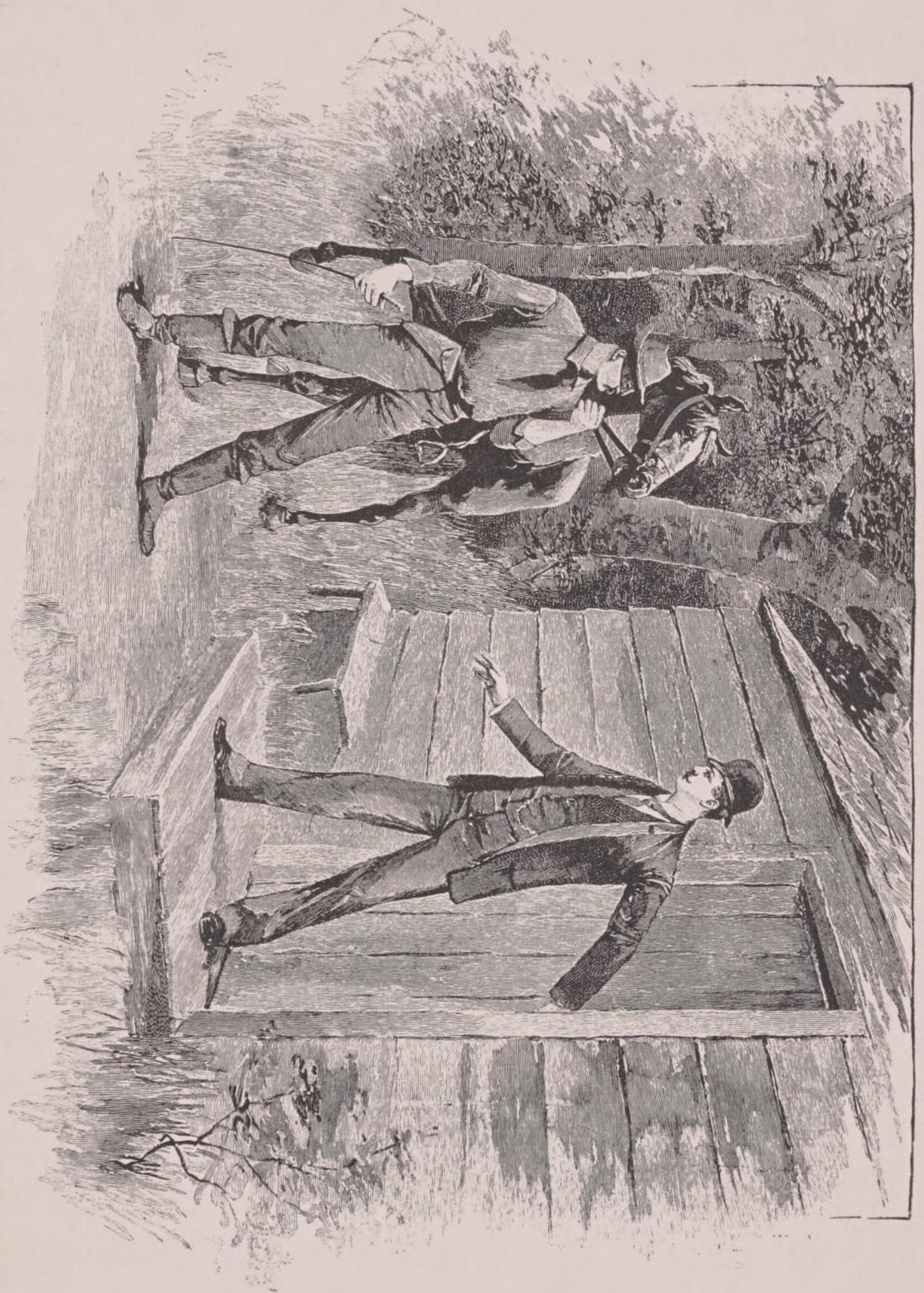
“Will you swear to me that this oath I shall require at your hands shall be kept with the sacredness of these two memories? Will you swear never to break it? Will you lift your hand toward the heaven you will say we outrage, and swear to keep the oath I shall make you take to save your life from the hands of murderers and robbers?”

Her voice grew solemn and slow and awful in its very intensity of feeling, as she spoke. Allan Mansfield felt a sense of awe in her presence, as he stood just out of reach of her, and gazed into her face. Her mention of his mother wakened tenderness toward this woman outlawed by the rules of society, and he said within himself, that he would indeed treasure as sacredly an oath to her, be it what it might, as he would to his mother or his God.

She reached out her hands toward him, but would not let them touch him nor his touch her, as she said, slowly and distinctly:

“Allan Mansfield, will you swear to me by all your love for your mother, by all your hopes of love from another, by the reverence in your heart for your God, that never from this moment, never from the time you cross this threshold, never from the time you pass from my sight to-day, you will utter to a living soul this adventure through which you have passed in safety only by my hands? Never to utter one word or give one hint of the house in the woods, where is held the rendezvous of robbers and murderers, and among whom is a woman who has risked her life for yours, until twelve months shall elapse; and never during your whole life, nor after your death, leave any written word of where you have been, nor who has saved you? When the twelve months have passed, you are at liberty to tell of this experience, even show the place where you remained, at the very door of death, through a night as lonely as the grave itself! These things you can then tell if you choose, but never, on peril of your life and the life of the one dearest to you, breathe one syllable of what the persons are like, nor describe by one word the woman who has saved you. Be it

ALLAN STEPPED OUT UPON THE LITTLE PLATFORM WHERE HIS HORSE WAS STANDING.—See Page 5 4.



enough that you are saved. Some time, in the future, when the brand has worn away from my heart, I myself may speak; but you, never!"

She was magnificent in her excitement. Allan faced her in silence for a moment. Then she turned her head toward the window as though she heard the approach of some one, and added, in an intense whisper:

"Do you swear this to me, Allan Mansfield? Will you take this oath upon your soul, or will you fail me at the door of your escape from death?"

He hesitated. It was a terrible thing, indeed, that she was asking of him. How many lives might he be placing in this same danger if he refused to give evidence that might end this outlaw band? But if he did refuse, then he could not tell either, for he would not live to repeat it! They could be cruel as the grave, he knew, indeed.

Her eyes were upon his and seemed to draw his very soul to hers, and the purity of her action made him grave, as he replied:

"But how can I, being a man, bearing the nobility of manhood, grant this oath of yours,

madam, when it may mean the death of others like myself, who come to you unconscious of ill? Could you ask me to do this? Would you do it?"

The lips grew stern and the fire of the eyes flashed into his.

"You have but a moment," she said, coldly, half turning away. "They are bringing around your horse. You must judge of this for yourself, only—" once more that flashing and flushing that transformed her as she reached out her hands toward him for the last time—"only there is this that will follow: Swear this to me here—now—*swear!*—*or you die!*"

His lips were as stern as hers; his eyes as searching.

"And you would murder me if I refused to take this oath?" he said, coldly, as she had spoken. "Is this your nobility, your womanhood, your reverence for a mother's name, and the name of your God—"

"Hush! Hush!" she cried, wildly. "How dare you talk to *me* of a mother's memory, or the memory of a God? How dare you ask me of my womanhood and my nobility after this

night? It is not I who would murder you. Believe me, it is not I! Could a woman commit murder in cold blood? Could a woman rob a mother of a son? You know not what you speak, Allan Mansfield! But of this you shall be warned: Do as I tell you—obey me at once—*swear, or you die!*”

“And if I die—” How grave his voice was. Even the woman paused in her frenzy, and looked at him, the warm color, that must have made her beautiful in her youth, rushing in a flood to her cheeks, reaching up even to her beautiful soft hair, falling to the low band of her dress about her white neck.

She would have touched him, but she dared not. She placed her hands behind her and clenched them, as though, by so doing, to place out of possibility her going to him any nearer than she was then.

“If you die,” she said, slowly, striving to keep her voice smooth, her eyes upon his, “if you die, Allan Mansfield, you will rob a mother of her son; a girl, somewhere, of her lover; and lay the stain of blood upon my soul. Will you swear now, Allan Mansfield—will you swear—or die?”

He, too, heard the horse's hoofs on the gravel, outside the door. Her head was bent toward the window, as though she could so know of what those outside might be saying or doing, but she kept her eyes upon his face. She could not let him go until she had done her best.

How did she know of Edith? The color rushed to his face, as her words struck his very soul. After all, of what use would it be for him to refuse to take this oath? He would never live to carry out any plan of disorganizing this band. They would have no mercy for one who would betray them. He could not expect that. And this woman, who had such a strange interest in him, and who touched some chord of memory that was too faint to be recalled, had risked her life to save his, and should he not accept it at her terms, for his mother's sake and for Edith?

The horse's hoofs paused at the steps. A heavy whip-butt struck the steps, and the woman drew herself erect before him, a new dignity upon her.

"Your time is at an end, Allan Mansfield.

They are ready, and you have delayed. What answer shall I give to them?"

She was moving toward the door, but he stepped forward and would have laid his hand on her arm, but she shrank from him, as though in terror lest he should touch her.

"Wait!" he said, almost with a gasp. It had come upon him suddenly, as such great events generally do come in one's life. "Give me but one moment longer, madam. How can I deny your gift? How can I refuse to swear as you would have me? Of what use would it be to refuse? It could do no good."

"No!" What a bitterness there was in her voice now! "Then you have changed your mind, and will swear as I request, Allan Mansfield? You will swear, lifting up your hand toward heaven, and in reverence to your mother, the girl you love, and your God—you will swear to never divulge this secret? You will never, by word or look, repeat what you have heard and seen here, until the twelve months have passed; and never, to the end of your life, tell who it was that saved you or describe to any person the features of her face,

nor leave any word after you are dead that can lead to the identification of who I am?"

Allan Mansfield lifted his hand in example of hers, and repeated after her the words of the oath.

"I swear it," he said, solemnly; "and God do to me accordingly as I keep my oath!"

The woman's hand fell to her side, and she turned away so coldly and calmly, without offering him one word of farewell, although he advanced to offer her such, that he paused, looking after her as she slowly but proudly left the room by the rear door, closing it softly after her, so shutting herself from him. And Allan crossed to the door, taking his hat from the stand beside the door, as he turned the handle and stepped out upon the little platform where his horse was standing, impatiently pawing the sod, the bridle-rein held in the powerful hand of one of those who had escorted him from the road to the home in the wilderness the previous evening. He wore a mask as he had upon that occasion, and, although Allan's eyes were sharp, and he gave him a look that would have engraved forever his likeness upon his memory

had the mask been absent; as it was, he gained but the faintest glimpse of a tawny mustache and full lips and no shadow of a beard. Then the man jerked the horse's bridle impatiently, and turned him off for him to mount.

There was no need of words; the motion was sufficient to inform Allan that unless he came at once, and that as fast as his legs admitted, he would be unmercifully left to his own fate. He sprang to the saddle and would have taken the bridle, but the man drew it over his arm and turned the horse's head away down the path toward the heart of the woods through which they had passed the previous night, though Allan could not help wondering how under the heavens the man ever knew which was the path that would eventually lead to the road that he should have passed safely over hours before but for this interruption.

There was not room for two horses to go abreast along that path, and this was the reason, Allan said to himself, that the man walked and led the horse by the head. The trees were so close together in long files that to have attempted to have broken a path through for

two would have ended disastrously. The path was so narrow that the lower boughs of the trees now and then caught in the saddle or in one's garments, passing through.

It was close companionship along the woodland route, and one if not both these strangely met men would have gladly parted company long ere they reached the open road, but there was some strong command upon the one, and the other knew not a step of the ground, so that it was necessary for them to keep as close together as though they were in the bands of most tender brotherhood.

Allan now and then glanced keenly down at this magnificently built man at his bridle-rein, as though he would pierce even the thick mask and mark the features that would have bent above him dead, long ere that, but for the power of a woman. But the mask was close and kept its secret well, and only that one glimpse had he caught of the tawny mustache and full lips and broad chin, for the man walked ahead looking neither to the right nor the left, though it would have gone hard with his prisoner had he attempted to escape, as his glance struck back-

ward whenever he deemed it necessary to look after the welfare of his passenger, and the revolver in his belt, concealed by the overlapping waistcoat, was near his hand and he would not have hesitated to use it to the best advantage—nay, might even have been glad of the opportunity.

But none came, and after what was even at the beginning of such a beautiful day a most tiresome ride, Allan once more found himself left upon the road exactly where he was the previous night, with his face toward Lake Placid, and his bridle-rein once more in his own hand, at liberty to ride as he would. And with this new and exciting sensation of freedom upon him, he struck the horse sharply with the whip that had been returned to him with the rein, and they dashed recklessly along the wooded road in the heart of the mountains, the woman's solemn words ringing to the tune of the horse's hoofs over the ground:

“Swear, or you die! Swear, or you die!”

CHAPTER V.

THE BEGINNING OF DIFFICULTIES.

The new sensation of freedom was to Allan Mansfield like a glass of champagne. The morning was beautiful, and the wind, sweeping his face as his horse dashed on through the rough road, the tall grasses of the roadside brushing his stirrups, stirred the heavy boughs of the trees on either side, bending them down and swinging slowly to and fro, rustled off through the glinting sunshine as mysteriously as it had come, along the spur of the mountains to the left.

Whiteface was aglow with green up to the base of the peak, and there the haunting mists shrouded his head and waved like veils of gauze, in defiance of him who would solve their mystery. Saddleback, with his humps of pines, leaned away toward the south, with Mackenzie and Baker straggling into more insignificance toward the lazy little river winding at their feet.

To the north the chain broke and mingled again with Catamount far away, Sugarloaf near it, and Marcy's huge shoulders looming beyond them, all like a king of the hills.

The world had never seemed so beautiful to Allan Mansfield as it did then. As his horse carried him along at a swinging gallop through the soft air and glimmering early sunlight, his eyes grasped the morning's beauty as though it were but newly born. Life, too, seemed a better thing than before. Even its harsh lines were smoothed by the blessing of living with young life in one's veins, and hope buoyant along one's blood.

As the woods cleared, and he turned the curve that brought him to the little village of Placid, his heart was bounding exultantly. Edith Hallston was in that village; he would see her ere an hour had elapsed; her warm hands would be in his, her bright face with those wonderful dark eyes would be before him, and all danger and sadness and despondency would give way for the sturdy young feet of love! What was that terrible night with its horrors compared with the days and nights spreading out before him

with their promise? What was the face of the woman marked by the hand of wrong and suffering, compared with the other womanly face with its sweetness and tenderness, and the eyes that could flash or soften for him at will?

He drew bridle at Allen's Hotel, and sprang from the saddle, whistling for some one to take his horse. The slope before the hotel was green with young summer, and stretched to the lake, whose blue waters sparkled, drifting under the shadow of the mountain. The carry looked like a thread separating the two larger bodies of water. Whiteface, looming above toward the east, was shrouded along its top with those exquisite mist-vails that wavered and parted only to close in deeper gray, hiding what lay beyond from the eyes of the world that beautiful morning.

Allan laughed easily, turning aside from the picture spread before him, and he again laughed, as he threw the bridle to the lad coming around to the steps at his call.

"An early arrival, eh, my boy?" he asked, lightly, as he lifted his hat that the breeze from over the lakes could cool his brow. Was the

night but a dream, after all? "I hope I'm not too early for breakfast, for I've as ravenous an appetite as an early ride can give one!"

The boy grinned as he slipped the bridle over his arm and gave the horse's soft nose a sly pinch, to make him start and toss his head.

"Guess you ken get suthin' to eat, though 'tain't breakfas'-time yet," he said. "We's fash'-nable hyar in summer, you know!"

Allan laughed and tossed him a quarter, which he caught dexterously.

"See that the horse has as good a breakfast as I," he said. "He's had a pretty hard pull since yesterday."

Then he bit his lip, and turned away hastily. The boy would know it had not taken him since the previous day to ride over from the lake. He must be on his guard and say nothing to rouse questioning. They would think he gained an early start, after remaining over night at Saranac, if he offered no explanations. As to the liveryman of whom he hired the animal, he could make it right with him.

He went up to the clerk in the office and asked

if his room was ready for him. He had telegraphed for it a week previously.

“Mr. Mansfield? Oh, yes, certainly!” The clerk was most affable. Ringing a bell beside him, he bade the boy who answered it to show the gentleman to No. 19, and after entering his name on the register, Allan mounted the stairs with his escort.

After a cup of coffee, which he ordered brought him at once, he threw himself upon the bed for a snatch of sleep, that he might be more himself when meeting Edith. He would not meet her in his present discomfited state of mind. He would be at his best always in her presence. His slumber was as sound and refreshing during the couple of hours he spent in oblivion as though he had slept the night through, and he opened his eyes upon a new world to him, with the knowledge that within the hour he would be with the girl whom he had braved death to meet, but who could not know what he had endured during her night’s dreaming.

He sprang from the bed, and soon went down to the dining-room with as sharp an appetite as though he were not in the strongest state of

excitement at the thought of whom he was to meet there presently.

As he entered the room his eyes swept the tables for her bright face, and he did not look in vain. She was near the window opening upon the cool view without; and, crossing the room, quite oblivious to the looks leveled at him from other as pretty eyes, he was welcomed as frankly and sweetly as he had known all along was waiting for him.

“You must have started early, to have reached us at this hour, Mr. Mansfield,” said Edith, with her soft, low laugh, a swift glance from under the curled brown lashes repaying him for any exertion he may have made in her behalf. “We do not usually have such early arrivals. There are generally stated hours of arrival and departure; but, then, you never do follow the rules laid down for commonplace people!”

How charming she was, and how sweet! Was she not in truth enough to sweep from one's mind any hardships he may have had to pass through for her sake?

“And, of course, you will join our little

breakfast party?" added this same sweet voice, with a small nod of the bright head, and a dimple appearing at the corners of the red mouth. "There is just room enough for one more, and, of course, we could not ask for a more entertaining companion than Mr. Mansfield."

"And equally of course no one could be more grateful for the invitation than Mr. Mansfield!" replied Allan, quite himself, though his pulses were fluttering under the glances from those bright eyes. "Besides, I am in an uncivilized state of hunger! I think I never enjoyed more thoroughly a ride before breakfast than I did this morning. Of course you have already distinguished yourself with oar and rudder, Miss Hallston?"

She shrugged her pretty shoulders and laughed.

"Y-e-s, I suppose you would call it distinguishing myself, Mr. Mansfield. At my first attempt, I came near drowning myself and poor Mrs. Castlemon; at the second, I somehow forgot my orders and steered straight into a boat that was crossing our bow and—Oh, well, there will be no trouble for you to comprehend the

consequences! They threatened me with all sorts of dreadful punishments. Mrs. Castlemon was the only one who had the sweetness to uphold me!"

Allan looked quite overcome.

"I hope you were not really hurt in either case, Miss Hallston. Was there no one to come to your assistance?"

"Oh, yes!" She laughed. She was tormenting him, and what woman would not have known it? She lifted her eyes for one moment to his with that expression of wickedness he had by that time become pretty well acquainted with. "There was not any particular danger, I suppose, if I had not gotten so frightened myself. But when I felt myself going down the first time, I lost all control, and screamed fit to wake the dead. Anyhow, Mr. Montgomery told me so afterward—"

"Mr. Montgomery?" There was danger as well as anxiety in Allan's eyes as he put this interrogation. He was not the man to sit tamely down and be outwitted by a man. If this Mr. Montgomery knew what was well for

him, he would betake himself off at once and leave the coast clear for Mr. Mansfield.

Again that tormenting dimple around the red mouth. Again that swift, flashing glance straight into his. The pretty shoulders were shrugged daintily, as Miss Hallston replied :

“ Yes. Mr. Arthur Montgomery. He hails from Canada, so he told me himself, and is very delightful company. We have been very good friends since that day—”

“ The day he saved your life?” There was an ominous growl in Allan Mansfield’s voice. He cursed himself inwardly for not being on the spot at that most opportune time. What had he delayed his vacation for? Was he to be beaten, after all, by some fool by the name of Arthur Montgomery, from Canada?

Miss Hallston recognized his fine show of wrath, but was, so far as appearances went, utterly unconscious of it, as she said, sweetly :

“ W-e-l-l, yes, he did save my life, I suppose. Anyway, I was going under the second time, and I’m sure I didn’t know much when he finally got me out. Ugh!” What a tormenting creature she was! Did ever any other woman know so

thoroughly how to drive a man to desperation with her shrugs and pretty scowls and mischievous dimples? "The water was so cold! One doesn't know how cold it is when one goes in without one's own sanction!" The trouble upon her face nearly upset his equanimity. "The lakes are very pretty, and it's fun to bathe when one wants a bath of one's own will, but when it comes to tumbling in promiscuously, it is altogether another thing!"

"Altogether!" he corroborated, calmly, though he could have treated Mr. Arthur Montgomery, of Canada, to a good dose of the same unpleasant treatment. "Now that I am here, I shall see that you are better cared for, Miss Hallston."

"But you don't know how well they do take care of me!" said Miss Halston, with that dreadful air of sweetness that was so distracting. "Every one is so good to me, Mr. Mansfield! You don't know how good every one is to me. I couldn't ask any one to be better to me!"

Of course, she could not *ask* for better care! Did he think she could, foolish man? Didn't he know she was tormenting him! Couldn't he

see that she was but taking up her old mischievous ways among the mountains that had kept him so uncertain of her heart the winter through? It surely was short time enough since he had seen her to not forget her nature.

“A fellow couldn't help being good to you!” he said, with great authority, as they rose from the table, presently. “Even a savage would treat you with due respect, Miss Hallston.”

She laughed gayly. This man amused her more than most men. There was something so tall and commanding about him, in spite of that open frankness that was like a boy's heart.

“As I can't put your assertion to the test, there being no savages nearer than the Congo, I shall be forced to take it for granted, Mr. Mansfield. Mrs. Castlemon and I are going over the carry to the foot of Whiteface, this morning. Are you rested enough from your trip to go with us, Mr. Mansfield? I may give you the opportunity to take good care of me. They say I am always getting into some mishap!”

“I shall be delighted!” He was alert enough then. “Will you remain there long enough to have a small luncheon, Miss Hallston? It would

be quite gypsy-like, if you would care for it. Besides, if you should attempt any dangerous feat, we would have better provision for regaining your strength!"

"I suppose you will never tire of teasing me about that!" she said, with a frown upon her brow. "I should not have told you, but I thought you would be sorry and take the better care of me, Mr. Mansfield."

What pathos there was in the sweet voice and in the lifted eyes!

Allan was quite beside himself with delight. He had not yet been distanced by any man, be he from Canada or from the most remote part of the earth—no, and he would not be, either, if it were in human power to make it otherwise.

"You know it is always my greatest pleasure to care for you," he said, gravely, though he made no offer of warmer friendship. Allan Mansfield understood himself and the woman he was with too well to make such a mistake. "Are there to be any others in the party, Miss Hallston?"

"Would you wish others to come? Have you any friend you would invite, Mr. Mansfield?"

We grant you the liberty to invite any such. As to ourselves, we have invited no one excepting yourself and," the slightest pause between the words, "Mr. Montgomery."

"Of Canada!" added Allan, unconsciously, between his teeth.

Miss Hallston laughed merrily. She walked beside him in the most engaging unconsciousness, as they left the dining-room, without so much as a blush at her own coquetry. There were plenty of eyes upon them as they passed from the room, and emerged upon the piazza in the shade where the breeze from the mountains swept the heat from the world.

"I am afraid you are not in the best of humor, Mr. Mansfield," she said, wickedly. "Did you rest well after your trip of yesterday?"

He laughed. Who could keep ill-nature long in the presence of that girl? She was so fresh and frank and breezy herself, one must put aside all unpleasantness with her.

"Well, I haven't the slightest objection to the presence of Mr. Montgomery, then," he said, gayly, "whether he be, as I might say, from Canada or the Congo. Of course, he is hand-

some and wealthy and young, but after all I have no fear of Miss Hallston giving place to new friends that belonging to the old. It isn't her way."

"At least you have faith in me," she laughed, sweetly. "If all my friends had as much faith, it might be more pleasant. Especially"—she was going too far in this conversation, and must change the current—"especially, when I attempt to drown them, and they refuse to be drowned!"

"Drowning isn't a remarkably pleasant death, in spite of what others will say," said Allan, calmly, well satisfied with her small self-defense; "but if I had to be drowned, I prefer its coming from Miss Hallston's distinguishing attempts."

How gayly she laughed.

"Then you'll not struggle, or cry out, or make some dreadful remark about the clumsy work of some women, I suppose?" she said, merrily.

Then she added suddenly, as though the thought had just occurred to her:

"You remained over night at the Lake, of course. At what hotel did you stay?"

A slow deep flush rose to his face. He could no more repress it than he could have foreseen

the question. What should he tell her? He had passed his oath to keep his night's adventure a secret even from her. He could not lie to her; if he should, with the hope that it might be forgiven him under the circumstances, she would undoubtedly find it out, and despise him. He had never attempted to deceive any one in his life that the tables were not turned upon him. And if he should give her this opportunity to mistrust him, might not this new friend of hers, this Arthur Montgomery, of Canada, step into his place in her friendship? He would not bear that. He must manage to get through this false position in some manner.

"How warm it is here after the cool dining-room;" he said, quietly, standing very still beside her. "I beg your pardon, Miss Hallston. You asked me—"

"Oh, it doesn't matter!" She turned from him with a new, proud hauteur in her manner and voice. "You are not yourself to-day, Mr. Mansfield. Had you not better rest than attempt to join our exploring party? Your ride was doubtless very tiresome this morning. You should not have attempted it so early."

He stood motionless, watching her moving away from him, powerless to detain her, powerless to explain why he could not reply to this question of hers as frankly as he had always replied to a question.

“Of course, if your party is filled—” he began, angrily. But this was an injustice to her as well as to himself. Edith Hallston was not one to invite him if she had not truly wished his presence. “I am cross, there isn’t a doubt!” he added, and laughed, trying to be himself. But that, too, was a failure.

“Pray don’t make excuses,” said Miss Hallston, coldly, having paused a few feet from him, looking off across the lake to the mountain rising above the mists.

Allan made a desperate move. He crossed over to her side and stood there as proudly and as coldly as she. His eyes were not on the mountain however; they were upon the still, cold face beside him.

“I did get here early, didn’t I?” he asked rather irrelevantly, with a forced laugh. “To tell the truth, I didn’t ride all the way out from Saranac this morning, though! There’s a house

—a sort of hotel on the road, you know. It was getting pretty dark before I reached there. That is preferable to riding so far through those woods, don't you think so?"

Her face lighted, but she would not relent too soon.

"It is not a desirable road to travel in the dark, I should think," she said, calmly, still keeping her cold face from him.

"Had you ever attempted it you would discover that for yourself, as you discovered how pleasant it is to be drowned!" he retorted, with his old free laugh.

He knew she was relenting and would be herself by and by.

"It is too bad you missed the stage," she said, presently, a trifle more warmth in her voice, though she still would not grant him the ghost of a smile or softening of the rigidly proud outlines of her face.

The breakfast groups were breaking up. Some of the guests went to their rooms, others appeared upon the piazza and the grounds. One young fellow from among these latter, catching sight of Allan upon the piazza, left his friends,

and ran up the steps, and over to him with extended hands and smiling face.

“You here at last all right, Al? Came up on the train with me, and never knew it till too late to run in partnership! I came over in a livery rig. Got left for the stage, you know. Stopped at the hotel half way, you see, and took supper. Two of us, you know. George Jackson and I. You remember George? Good fellow—just the sort to travel with. The right companion, eh, Miss Hallston? How’d you come over? Stage? Didn’t know you were in the house till I saw you just now. Breakfasted? Earlier than I? That’s why I didn’t see you. And you’ve been here all night, and I never knew it! It’s a wonder we didn’t divine each other’s presence!”

He was a good fellow—was this new-comer. He laughed and joked, and melted the coldness between the two friends, as they could not have done if left to themselves; but Allan began to fear, after his mentioning that he and his friend had supped at that half-way hotel, that he would be discovered in his prevarication. He had not lied openly. He had merely given a small hint of the possibility of his having re-

mained over night at that hotel ; but Edith was not to be easily blinded. All he could do was to keep as far from the subject of hotels and the road over as was possible.

“ And where’s George ? ” asked Allan, when his friend had pretty well used up his enthusiasm at their meeting. “ He came over with you, you said ? ”

“ *Of* course ! We’re inseparable, you know ! ” And this new friend laughed easily. “ Chums, you know ! Went to college and through all the scrapes as one fellow. Couldn’t be separated. That’s friendship for you, Miss Hallston ! George’ll be down in a short time. He’s asleep, you see. And you stayed at this very hotel all night and we did not know it ! Why didn’t you look us up in the register ? ”

Allan laughed. Things were growing awkward for him, but he must get himself out all right.

“ How should I know you were here ? And why didn’t you look me up, pray ? ”

“ Tit for tat, eh ? Well, we didn’t look you up because we didn’t know you were coming right on. Saw you get off at the station back there at Saranac, but couldn’t catch you, somehow, and

when we looked around for you, you were not to be found. You possess that faculty, you know. I'll bring George. He'll be immensely glad to see you."

"I thought you said he was still sleeping," said Allan, daringly. He would keep the conversation off the dangerous topic as long as it was possible. Any subject was better than that.

"So he was the last I saw of him, but it'll take me just five minutes to bring him up and down here, when he knows you're here. I'll try it, if you say so."

"No." Allan laughed. "Don't pretend that he's such an intense admirer of mine, as that he would break his sleep for the sight of me an hour sooner than he otherwise would! Any of the other fellows here?"

"No; none that you know, I think. Unless—hold on. Do you know Montgomery—Arthur Montgomery? He lives in Canada, and, as it happened, we struck company at Montreal. I was at the ice palace, you know. He's a good fellow enough, but rather slow. He'd faint at sight of a bear, I'm positive, and would run for all he was worth if a wildcat should be within

twenty miles of him. But he's nice in his way. He's good-natured, you know, and won't take it hard if you run him a bit. He knows his deficiencies as well as his friends do."

"Oh, that sort of a fellow!" Allan hadn't much fear of him, then. That wasn't the style of man with whom Edith Hallston would fall in love. So far he was safe. "No; I fail to remember the gentleman. Never met, I think. What sort of a looking man is he?"

"Oh, goodish enough. Sandy hair, you know, and mustache and those light-blue eyes that go with that hair generally. It isn't his looks that he goes on, it's his good-nature. You simply can't get him wrathful if you try."

"He can't have much spirit," Allan said, forgetting for the instant the words were uttered that he was a friend of Edith's, and had saved her life, "to run from a bear in the Adirondacks where there isn't such an animal—or mighty few—and never to lose his temper."

"I think it is nicer to have a good temper than to be disagreeable as some people know how to be," said Edith, sweetly, but with the deepest and direst meaning in her voice. "It is

such a novelty to meet such a man that one might be tempted to fall in love with him on the spot!"

"Pray don't, Miss Hallston!" said the other, merrily, puckering up his brows ruefully. "It might send him up in the seventh heaven, but what a low state it would leave the rest of us in!"

"Oh, yes, and he saved your life; one should not forget that!" said Allan, calmly. "How did he ever come to do it if he is such a coward?"

"But he isn't a coward—" began Edith in indignant protest. "There isn't a cowardly hair in his head! But you may ask him, Mr. Mansfield, and he may be better able to tell you how he came to do it than I could. Here he comes at this moment."

"Speaking of angels!" murmured the lively young fellow, with an amused smile around his lips. "What do you think of him, Mansfield?"

Allan turned to view the newcomer, somewhat eager to see for himself what this rival of his was like—for he classed him as a rival

instinctively. As he was neither brave nor handsome, the danger lessened, but Edith upheld him because he was good-natured, and it had been his own ill fortune to show her a decided ill-nature that very morning!

He was rather short, the approaching man, and slenderly built, but there was something so pleasant about his ruddy face and sandy hair that Allan began to dislike him at the first glance. He appeared upon the piazza among the crowd with the utmost ease, and after a slow glance around, descried Miss Hallston with her friends not far from him, and lifting his hat, seeing that they were looking his way, he approached them.

“You are late,” said Edith, sweetly, with that bewitching side glance Allan had thought reserved for himself alone. “And such a charming morning, Mr. Montgomery! You came near being left behind by our party.”

He flushed, and murmured some apology, that was for her ear alone, and she laughed with all possible grace.

“Never mind. You are still in time. Mr. Montgomery have you met Mr. Mansfield?”

"I AM AFRAID YOU ARE NOT IN THE BEST OF HUMOR, MR. MANSFIELD," SHE SAID.—See Page 70.



Mr. Mansfield, this is my friend, who I told you rescued me from the effects of one of my distinguishments. You must be good friends. You say you have met Mr. Montgomery, Mr. Deland?"

The jolly young man bowed and smiled. Mr. Montgomery bowed and smiled also.

"I have had that pleasure, Miss Hallston. Glad to see you looking so well, Montgomery. The last time I saw you, you were pretty well done up by that rush down the toboggan slide."

They laughed as over some pretty good joke, and then Edith said, quietly :

"If we are going across the lake, we had better start while it is cool. The sun gets so dreadfully warm late in the day. I will find Mrs. Castlemon, and we will start. Do you care to join us, Mr. Deland?"

"Sorry, I'm sure, Miss Hallston, but as I promised Jackson to go over with him to Saranac on some business about his luggage, it isn't possible. You will let me go with you some other day?" She nodded carelessly.

In a few minutes they were off, a boy accompanying them with a basket of luncheon; but

the day was darkening for Allan Mansfield, for Edith had managed her affair pretty well, and was walking beside Mr. Montgomery, while Mrs. Castlemon was left for his own care.

“I wish he'd been at the bottom of the sea before he saved her life!” he muttered to himself more than once during the day; but this did not imply that he wished Miss Hallston had been left to drown!

CHAPTER VI.

ONE OF MISS HALLSTON'S DISTINGUISHING ATTEMPTS.

“If you rode over on a livery horse, what are you going to do with the horse?” asked Miss Hallston, abruptly. She had been walking on ahead with Mr. Montgomery, and paused suddenly to ask this alarming question of Allan. “It surely can't walk back of it's own accord, Mr. Mansfield!”

“No.” Allan was quite gruff in his reply.

Her sweetness toward Mr. Montgomery, in full view of him, was working most dire effects upon him. There was scarcely a shred of good-nature left in him. It was quite past endurance, the way she could fool with old friends for the new. He would not have believed it of Edith Hallston had he not seen and heard it with his own eyes and ears. "Mr. Deland was kind enough to offer to see it back in the stable. You need not have worried about the animal, Miss Hallston."

"Especially not that animal," said Mr. Montgomery, laughing. "There are suffering creatures nearer than a livery horse for your sympathy, Miss Hallston!"

"Are you suffering, poor Mr. Montgomery?" she asked, wickedly, an answering laugh upon her lips. "It is intensely warm here so near the lake. Suppose we move further inland? Under the shade of the pines it should be cooler."

"You will not find it particularly cool anywhere under the mountain, with the wind to the northeast," said Mr. Montgomery, with an air of great wisdom. "If we could reach the top, we would not complain of the heat; as that is

impossible, we must make ourselves as comfortable as we can where we are."

"It would not do to venture far away from the lake and sight of the hotel," added Mrs. Castlemon. Mrs. Castlemon was a charming woman for companion. She had been Edith Hallston's companion and chaperon ever since her mother's death three years previously. She and Edith were the warmest friends.

"But we could not lose ourselves if we tried, so near the lake as we are, Mrs. Castlemon, dear," said Edith, laughing gayly. "That would be an adventure, even poor, luckless Edith Hallston, with her fate for getting into difficulties deep and dangerous, would never have the luck to meet with! It would be altogether too new and delightful for me to attempt! So you are not to worry, you dear, sweet Mrs. Castlemon! Mr. Montgomery will take good care of me. He can, you know."

Mrs. Castlemon smiled. She could never be harsh with the girl, no matter what might be the girl's fault.

"If we had brought a guide, as we should have done, Edith, there would have been no

objection to our venturing as far inland as you desire," she said, sweetly. "As it is, we must content ourselves with the coolest spot we can find on the border of the lake, and in view of the hotel."

"Dear, dear!" Edith laughed so merrily that the tears stood upon the long lashes. "What a protecting creature you are, Mrs. Castlemon! If I would only always follow your advice there would be no fear of falling into the lake and getting drowned, or swamping other people's boats, and getting a dreadful lecture! I shall some day learn wisdom from you. You are such a dear!"

"If it is the heat you particularly object to," said Allan, coldly, but with an angry glance from under his frowning brows at Mr. Montgomery who stood on the bank where they had paused to consider their position, Edith's hand in his, as he steadied her on the slippery, treacherous grass, "if that is your strongest objection, I think it would be well to go to the left, further in the shade. It is out of sight of lake and hotel, but quite near both to be entirely safe. Would you like to try it, Mrs. Castlemon?"

Mrs. Castlemon assented without the slightest hesitation. Allan Mansfield was safely to be relied upon among those mountains. He had been there the previous year, and had hunted among the wilderness of pines so often that she had not the least fear to be guided by him.

“The mountains keep off the breeze so,” she said, wiping her sweet, flushed face with the smallest film of a lace handkerchief. “I cannot endure the heat. Some way, it takes the life right out of me. Winter is my favorite season.”

“Oh, but summer is so delightful for picnics and lawn-parties and hammocks and boating!” cried Miss Hallston, with great animation. She still stood poised upon the bank with her hand in Mr. Montgomery’s hand, looking down upon the two behind them, with a fine show of gayety. What had the weather, hot or cold, to do with her young blood?

“And to get drowned in,” added Mr. Mansfield, quite bitterly, glowering upon the charming scene before their eyes. “It might be a good idea to put your theories of drowning into

practice to-day, Miss Hallston. It would be cool in the lake, at least."

She shrugged her shoulders artlessly. She raised her pretty brows the least trifle.

"Couldn't think of it, Mr. Mansfield. The exertion of overturning a boat would be too much over the pleasure of granting you the delight of drowning. It is much nicer to sit down somewhere here in the shade and eat something nice, and talk a little and sing—you sing, Mr. Montgomery—than to sit in the sun in a boat and simply bake!"

"Consequently," said Mr. Montgomery, while Mr. Mansfield glowered more than ever at the soft insinuation that he should sing for her, "we will find the cool spot to which we are bound, and take life easy the rest of the day."

"Or, until dinner-time," added Miss Hallston, with disgraceful haste. She was too healthy not to enjoy a good meal.

They laughed. Even Mr. Mansfield relented enough to allow of smiling. It was very hard to keep at drawn swords with Miss Hallston.

"Oh!" She had let go Mr. Montgomery's hand, and was venturing in the search by herself,

ahead of the others. "Here is just the spot we were searching for. Isn't it the dearest thing! Even you couldn't have done better, Mr. Mansfield; and as for a guide, Mrs. Castlemon, he could never have found this charming little bower!" She stood parting the bending bows of pine at the edge of the path ahead of them, her face peering out of the bower of green like a glowing picture. "Isn't this exactly what we wish, and could there be anything better, unless it were to be at the top of the mountain, where the breeze must be delicious? There is room enough for us, but not space for another! Poor Dick!" turning to the boy. "You shall be lightened of your load at once, and can go right back to the hotel. It would be cruel to keep you with us. As to the basket, if it isn't too bothersome, we will fetch it with us. If it does seem too much of a burden, we will leave it here under that tree—see?—and you can come over for it some time when you want a run."

He knew enough of Miss Hallston to know it was not the basket alone he would get for the trouble. So he grinned in the most knowing manner, and set down the rather large and

decidedly heavy burden, just so it would be handiest to her, and turned away in the direction of the hotel, whistling cheerily but discordantly of—

“Down went McGinty to the bottom of the sea.”

Edith laughed gayly, listening to the prohibited musical wonder. Mrs. Castlemon stopped her ears with her two pretty, white hands. By the way, Mrs. Castlemon was neither old nor ugly. She was, if that be admitted, even more beautiful than Edith. Her eyes were black, and soft in expression; her complexion a pure olive, while the color in her cheeks—broken now and then by bewildering dimples—was like the warmest hue of a rose's heart. She sat upon the moss and pine needles, with Mr. Mansfield beside her, and Edith standing just beyond, watching the boy sauntering down the path toward the carry, Mr. Montgomery calmly and quite unconcernedly fanning himself with his straw hat. When the boy was out of sight, Edith sat down upon the moss and needles, beside Mr. Montgomery, facing the other two. She sat with her back to

one of the slender pines, and leaned her head against the rough bark, tossing her hat upon the ground. As it happened, this hat was drifted by the faint breeze almost to Mr. Mansfield's feet. This, however, he quite ignored, to all appearances. She even clasped her hands behind her head in a most charming and negligent attitude, and said :

“I must be descending to melancholy! It is the dreadful heat, and having nothing else to do. The only way to keep me from mischief is to keep me very busy.”

“Oh!” Mrs. Castlemon laughed, raising her brows quizzically. “I see what you mean, Edith, my dear! It is the basket you desire to attack, and wait for us to ask for! You are hungry again, in spite of that breakfast!”

“But I didn't eat much breakfast—not nearly as much as usual, you know, because Mr.—

And then she came to a stand. The warm color rushed over her face. The dark eyes fell before Mr. Mansfield's searching gaze. She frowned and bit her lip. It wasn't comfortable to be caught so by her own words! Then she lifted her eyes, bravely, straight to his, and in

spite of the color still in her cheeks, continued her sentence slowly, but steadily :

“ Mr. Mansfield came in, you remember, Mrs. Castlemon, and it seemed so like catching a glimpse of a home face—we knew him so well last winter—that it quite took away my appetite. You should have known how it would affect me, and have waited till after breakfast.” she added, laughing easily now, and giving him a kinder glance than she had favored him with since that first touch of coldness in her manner toward him.

His heart somehow felt considerably lighter. She might come to her colors valiantly, and conquer her agitation as she would and could, but he had not failed to see that tell-tale heart color rush upon her face, and he knew, however she might finish the sentence, she had, at heart, deeper meaning in her words than she would betray. So he, too, laughed, and looked quite his old self, meeting her eyes that would not flinch from his.

“ And you should have warned me of your liable sensations upon my appearance so suddenly, and I would have kept away with the greatest pleasure, Miss Hallston,” he said, lightly.

“Nevertheless, I wouldn't object in the least to something very nice to eat, as I did poor justice to the meal myself. Will it be safe to venture upon provisions so early in the day? If we should be shipwrecked, we would be quite without the means of nourishment.”

“And there would be nothing left for you to portion out to each shipwrecked piece of humanity with your small, white hands, as they have it in novels,” added Mr. Montgomery, gayly. “We would fall wofully short of dramatics. All we could munch on would be walking-boots and straw hats. Too dry by half! It's always part of a leather boot at least, and then I never noticed that the starved creature ever got farther than the top of the leg.”

“Nasty goat-skin, too!” cried Mrs. Castlemon, with a pretty shudder. “Don't bring up such disagreeable subjects as appetizers, Mr. Montgomery. I prefer peaches and jellies and chicken salads. Of course it's nice to be lionized after the rescue, but the suffering and the dreadful looks of the poor, hungry things—”

“And the dyspepsia caused by the indigestible leather—” added Mr. Mansfield, wickedly

“And the toothache from trying to bite into goatskin—” added Miss Hallston, with twinkling eyes.

“And the pervading odor of boots—” suggested Mr. Montgomery, all equally bent on teasing the pretty widow. “It’ll never do—never do in the world, Mrs. Castlemon! Please portion out to us calves’ foot jelly and the salad, Miss Hallston. We’ll report as favorably upon your bravery in doing that and the whiteness of your hands, as though we were—

“ ‘A shipwrecked sailor waiting for a sail—’

Tennyson. Poetry and salads go better with the day and the subjects that an open boat and an open sea.”

“ ‘Under the spruce and pine,
Who loves with me to dine?’ ”

whispered Miss Hallston, with wicked eyes, in return for their sallies regarding her office as waitress.

“Oh!” groaned Mr. Montgomery with rolling eyes. “Fair creature, you have your revenge.

A poet and waitress in one lovely form? When will the gifts of the gods be equally divided among mortal men?"

"But I'm not a man!" retorted charming Miss Hallston, with considerable vivacity. "Men are never blessed with such gifts. It's to the gentler sex the gods send their double gifts, Mr. Montgomery!"

"And poetry and calves' foot jelly are quite appropriate for the present occasion," joined in Mr. Mansfield, sturdily, doing justice to the dainty sandwich he held in one hand, the other occupied with an enormous piece of peach pie.

"And poetry is ever so much nicer than boot legs and the odor of leather, Mr. Montgomery!" championed Mrs. Castlemon, with a new bravery. She, too, was doing justice to the luncheon Edith had superintended. Perhaps it was the odor of pines and the freedom that gave them their appetites; anyway, they ate as only really hungry people can eat. They were in the heart of silence; scarcely a leaf stirred upon the silver birches nearer the lake; scarcely a bird note broke the tender hush. Even the sound of voices in the distance toward the hotel died

away. When conversation died, sound died—sound died, save that mysterious, mystical *life* that is in such a silence.

“I am so glad we came,” declared Miss Hallston, in a burst of eloquence, after such a silence. Her eyes held new light, her face an entirely new expression. She was a fit devotee to rest there in the heart of the hills, with their mystery and silence around her.

Allan watched her from under his half-closed lids. He was stretched out upon the moss and needles, his elbow on the ground, his head in the hollow of his hand. Luncheon was over and they were resting, trying to keep cool in that intense heat. Allan could not understand why she had so suddenly changed toward him during their conversation on the piazza, and that was puzzling him considerably, as he lay there watching her from under his half-closed eyes.

She may have felt his gaze. Who knows the workings of a woman's heart or the subtle current of her wisdom? Still leaning against the tree in that careless attitude, she let her eyes fall to his face. Quite steady her gaze was, not flinching or turning aside when she caught the

gleam from under the heavy lashes. Not a muscle of her face changed, not a trace of deeper color rose to her face. That new, sweet, wonderful light deepened in her eyes. That was all the visible change, and only that was visible to the eyes of the man who loved her.

“It is good to be here,” she said, continuing after a dead pause. Her companions seemed too comfortable even to talk. “Those little trivial things that cause one so much unhappiness out there,” with a motion of her head toward the hotel, her eyes never leaving the quiet face resting in the strong hand, “fall into such insignificance in a silence like this, where everything is magnificent. Things hurt less when there is such a balm as this soft balsam odor, and the mystery of the mountains carries one’s thoughts beyond mere selfish, mean, untrue human life. I am glad I came—and glad that I came to-day.”

The eyes under the half-closed lids did not change in their steady gaze into the eloquent face. Not a movement of the handsome, manly face changed. If she could conceal her heart, so could he. They were equal in that.

Again the silence fell between them as though

it fell down softly from the pines above. A laugh somewhere on the lake floated faintly, as though through a dream, to their green bower. No one spoke. Edith's brilliant eyes seemed the only touch of life's throbbing and pain.

Mr. Montgomery, too, was lying lazily upon the moss. The languor of the day was in his face, but there was a gravity upon it.

After a time Edith laughed. She rose and shook out the folds of her dress, as though she would shake out the marvelous wisdom of her words.

"I almost wish we had brought a guide with us," she said, carelessly. "I would like to attempt climbing the mountain."

A murmur of horror rose.

"Not in this heat?" cried Mrs. Castlemon, turning a shade rosier at the thought.

"With the sun so searching it gets even through this undergrowth!" cried Mr. Montgomery, again fanning himself with his hat, as though the thought quite overpowered him.

"And it is a long way to the top," added Mr. Mansfield, calmly.

"And, dear me! we're all too lazy," finished

Edith herself, laughing gayly. "You fail to appreciate the view and the breeze to be found at the top because of that dreadful climb in between. Oh! that's philosophy for you. Accept what you have rather than overheat yourself for better."

"I am sure it is the salad," murmured Mrs. Castlemon, with great apparent concern. "You must be more careful what you eat, Edith, my dear."

"No"—there was not a trace of ill-nature in the girl's heart—"it is the fish sandwich, Mrs. Castlemon, my dear. Fish generates brains, wise men say."

"Oh!" a gasp that quite extinguished the party. "The air of the pines are having effect. Be careful how you betray such acquirements over there," with a motion toward the hotel. "It isn't safe—truly, it isn't safe, Edith!"

"For me or for them?" and Edith's pretty head motioned in the same direction.

"For both, of course," and Mrs. Castlemon looked decidedly merry. There was never any telling what Edith would do or say next.

"Well," the girl sighed, and re-seated herself,

moving a trifle nearer Mr. Mansfield, to get away from a sunbeam that stole through the boughs, following the tree trunk, and struck in her eyes. "Well, I suppose it will be the same a hundred years from now, whether I climb the mountain or stay where I am. It is only the difference of being more comfortable instantly or after awhile. I shall certainly go up there some day, though."

"Sunset or sunrise is the best time," said Mr. Mansfield, in his cool, unconcerned manner. "But it would not be well to attempt it in one day, Miss Hallston. It is customary to go up one day and come down the next. The climb leaves one little breath. Besides, it takes some time to accomplish it."

"We will organize a party to go up soon," said Mrs. Castlemon, by way of reconciling Edith. "That will be the nicest way, and much more lively. We can go up for sunset. That is prettiest, I think."

"And there would be such a chattering of tongues, one would have no opportunity to appreciate the view," said Edith, scornfully. "I

hate a crowd at such a time, as you very well know, Mrs. Castlemon, my dear."

"But we need have no crowd," urged Mrs. Castlemon, calmly. She was not to be moved on such a day as that, when the least exertion meant more heat.

"But you know very well, that if one chooses a half-dozen, another half-dozen will in some way work in. It is sure to be so. You can't help it. It's the fate of parties!"

"Well, some day I shall go up all by myself and a guide," said Edith, with calm decision. "And it will be before the crowd, too, I assure you, Mrs. Castlemon!"

"Well, well, Edith!" She could not even argue with this determined young lady upon such a day. "Of course, you will do as you wish, as you always do."

"Of course!" and Edith laughed. Then she sighed and resumed her former position, with her hands behind her head and her eyes looking out between the close boughs of pine, away from her companions, as it was evident her thoughts were.

And again silence fell upon them. Mrs. Cas-

tlemon even closed her eyes after a vain attempt to read the novel, and Mr. Montgomery was either asleep or dreaming day-dreams, for his eyes, too, were closed, and he did not stir. Allan Mansfield remained quite immovable, looking up and up through the green to the tiny hint of blue, miles—how many miles?—above. He lost the thread of their conversation. Edith's voice mingled in his thoughts, but he lost sight of her. The previous night returned to him, with its danger and mystery. The woman's face and voice came back as clearly as though she herself were before him. He could even see the rising and falling of her bosom as she leaned toward him, yet with that unmistakable command for him not to touch her, and her glowing eyes as she gave him his oath that would save his life, but must always remain a mystery until the time should come—if it ever did come—when she herself would make plain her meaning in her mystery. It was, when he came to think of it, a terrible oath, for already it was falling over his life, darkening the frank friendship between himself and the girl for whose good opinion he cared most in life.

Already it was laying its hold upon him with its mystery and mastery. A few words. Some might even break the few simple words so easily uttered. But Allan Mansfield—never! He took the oath, knowing of the possible outcome, and he would keep to it, though it should wound him to the life.

Besides—and here he caught his breath swiftly—had the woman not said it would bring death upon not only himself but the one nearest and dearest to him if he betrayed her? Even so much as a hint of what he had passed through must remain buried in his own heart till those twelve months should pass. Twelve months! What might not happen in twelve months of thirty days each? What might not come to him to darken his life of three-score years and ten!

He started as the thoughts crowded upon him, and struggled to his feet as though he would strike out in the wilderness and fight this mysterious battle alone. He forgot the heat and the exertion. He forgot everything but that this oath might come between him and the girl for whom he cared the most in the world!

He started to his feet and stood there for an instant, motionless. Something was wrong. For a moment he could not comprehend what this was, but that there was something happened that should not have happened. He rubbed his eyes, misbelieving that he could have fallen asleep. He looked this way and that, started forward and peered through the boughs beyond, on all sides, listened and waited. Nothing could he see or hear, save that low, distant laugh upon the lake.

He had been asleep then! His thoughts were not merely waking thoughts, but partly the nightmare fancies of sleep! The peril of the night before had come to him with a half warning. There was reason in his dread.

He trembled, and grew suddenly white around the stern mouth. A new expression came into the eyes still searching the green distance. As though he were blessed with comprehending what was not seen, he knew what had happened:

Stopping, he laid his hand upon Mr. Montgomery's arm, and called excitedly to him:

“Oh, I say, Montgomery! Wake up, will you? Miss Hallston has gone!”

CHAPTER VII.

AN INCONSISTENT WOMAN.

Montgomery was upon his feet at once, as Allan's shout told him of Miss Hallston's disappearance. He rubbed his eyes bewilderedly, and looked at Allan as though he could not comprehend what was meant by his words. What if Miss Hallston had gone? So far as he could see, there was nothing particularly alarming in it. But Allan's excited face left little doubt that it was something beyond the mere disappearance of the girl. Mrs. Castlemon, too, was thoroughly roused by the excited voice.

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Montgomery.

"Can't you see?" cried Allan, scarcely aware of how he expressed himself in his alarm. "Can't you see, man? She has gone!" He pointed to the empty seat under the pine, and the disappearance of the hat that had lain on the moss at his feet. "She has taken her hat. She

wished to climb the mountain, knowing nothing of the dangers attending such an undertaking, and no one knows how long she has been gone, nor how far she may have gotten. Perhaps you don't comprehend, either of you, what all this means, for you may not know the mountain as well as I; but the only thing to do is for us to follow her as well as we can guess her route. She can so easily get lost in the thick undergrowth!"

Montgomery was himself instantly. It came to Allan even then what a strange man he was—coward, and yet brave! Mrs. Castlemon did not, as Allan feared she might, lose her self-command. She stood beside them, her face quite white, but perfectly under her control, only her hands clasped convulsively before her, her eyes searching the faces at her side.

“What way will you take?”

How quiet her voice was! Allan looked down upon her with sudden confidence in her power. Mr. Montgomery did not speak. Allan would lead the way; it was only for him to follow. That was no time for words, for it must have been considerable time since the girl left

them. The sun was past the meridian. At the very least, she must have been gone two hours.

“There may be no danger,” Allan said, and he kept his voice quiet by strength of will. “We must prepare for the worst, that is all. The mountain is not one to easily venture upon without a guide, even for a man; it is doubly dangerous for a woman. We will take the path that runs past this hollow. She would be most likely to follow that. If she continues in the path, we may have no difficulty. If she strays—”

“Don’t wait!” said Mrs. Castlemon, hurriedly. “Is there anything I can do? Tell me if there is, and then go—”

“Would it not be well,” Montgomery broke in here, his voice steady and cool, “for Mrs. Castlemon to go quietly back to the hotel and send a guide over? She can do this without exciting any one. Miss Hallston would not wish any excitement. Go to the clerk and make him understand thoroughly what you want, and he will do it.”

“But better still”—Allan was searching his pockets ere the other finished—“take this card to Mayne; he’s the best guide in the place. Tell

him about this. There isn't a step on these mountains that he doesn't know, I believe. Don't tell another soul!"

"And you will come out upon the carry a few feet back here," said Montgomery, quietly, his eyes upon the steady black eyes lifted to his with a strange expression in them. "You cannot get from the path if you are careful."

A slow, soft smile stirred her lips. A faint color returned to her white cheeks.

"Do not think of me," she said, and turned away, that they need delay no longer.

Mr. Montgomery turned and looked after her, as Allan led the way from the bower in the opposite direction from that taken by her. His companion did not notice him. There was a peculiar expression in his eyes, and he bit his underlip nervously, a puzzled frown upon his brow. Then he followed his companion, and the bower was left to its pines and mosses, with the ferns fainting in the heat of the searching sun.

Neither of the men spoke as they strode through the close, bending boughs and tangled underbrush, pushing briars and twigs aside with

ruthless hands, regardless of torn flesh or torn clothing. Allan's face was white and set. He comprehended more fully than the other what danger there was for the girl should she have left the path and wandered away in that dense growth, with the boughs above her so thick she could not discover the direction of the lake or the hotel. It would seem a comparatively easy thing for her to recover the path should she have left it, or to take the descent, and so come at last to the lake that must eventually bring her in view of the hotel. But it was a more difficult thing than it would appear. The thick underbrush would confuse her. The heavy boughs were impenetrable. To find the path again, should she have left it, might and might not be possible.

Allan Mansfield himself had been lost upon that same mountain, and he knew what the danger was for the girl so full of life and daring. She would scarcely realize her danger till too late to remedy it.

It was warm, intensely warm. The men pushed their hats back upon their heads and strode on, the perspiration in great drops upon

them, their faces aflame with heat and hurry and the exertion of climbing in that stifling atmosphere. They did not seem to have thought that this search upon which they were bent might be an unnecessary one; that the girl might have wandered only around their retreat, or down to the lake shore, or back to the hotel, as a joke upon them, never thinking of the consequences. They seemed to have some certainty that she had gone astray upon the mountain, and that danger was around her that might threaten her life. Neither asked of the other why this certainty should have possessed them. It had come to Allan like a flash of intelligence, and this had fallen upon his companion in the same unaccountable manner.

In the meantime, Mrs. Castlemon returned to the hotel. She did not return as they had gone, for there might be those upon the piazza who saw their departure who might question her as to the cause of her solitary return. She would keep any hint of what had occurred away from the knowledge of the gossipy tongues that had so little to talk about that this would be like a draught of fresh water to a thirsty soul. Instead

of crossing the carry and the road to the slope of the hotel lawn, she turned aside and went around to the rear entrance, feeling quite certain that she had not been observed.

There she lingered for a moment for a glass of water, saying simply that she had walked some distance in the sun and was slightly overcome by the heat. After that, in the most unconcerned way, with such a pretty smile in her eyes and around her lips that not one who heard her could have hesitated to do whatever she should desire, she asked of them who Mr. Mayne was. She had heard, she said, softly, that he was one of the best of guides, and she was thinking of making up a party to climb Whiteface, and, of course, if he were so excellent, she would wish to secure him for their party.

It was all very plausible, and they smiled upon her in return for her graciousness, and replied that Mayne was indeed one of the best of guides, but, at present, he was engaged for a hunt, and would not return for several days.

“Oh, dear!” How well she played her part!
“Then I will either have to wait for him to

return or engage some one else! Who is the next best to him—if there is any next best?”

“Yes, surely.” One or two pairs of eyes took on a darker expression at this praise of one special guide. There were other guides, and she should have known of that. Mayne was not a friend to all those in the servants’ hall. “There’s Daily,” one of them suggested, slowly, a certain scowl upon her face. The girl who spoke was a pretty waitress. “Daily’s as good a guide as you’ll find, I guess, Mrs. Castlemon. He’ll go with you, maybe. It’s hard to tell for certain. They are mostly engaged for a long way ahead.”

“Will you find him for me now?” coaxed that persuasive voice, the smile still upon the pretty lips. “We have been planning an excursion, and I want to get ahead of the others and have arrangements made before they know of it!”

“I’ll see if he’s about the place,” said the girl, willingly, tying her apron-strings into a fresh bow.

Mrs. Castlemon smiled steadily. One would never have guessed for what she had come.

“You are pretty enough as you are, Estelle!”

she said. "He couldn't refuse your request if he had the hardest of hearts!"

The girl laughed shyly. She was pretty, and she knew it, and the guide was a handsome fellow. Any girl of her acquaintance would be glad of his favor. Mrs. Castlemon had won her heart.

Mrs. Castlemon passed on calmly to the office leaving word for the guide to go to her there, should he be found. How could they know that her heart was throbbing heavily with doubt and fear? How could they know that it might be upon an errand of life or death she would send him? At one end of the room, where the breeze crept coolly in through the open, shaded window, she sat down at a small table and waited. One of the clerks came up to her. There was something in her face, in spite of her wonderful self-control, that betrayed her agitation.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Mrs. Castlemon?" Every one liked her. She was not only beautiful but gracious, with a pleasant word for all. "It is very warm. Would you like a glass of soda or a lemonade? You can

have it here, and it would rest you. Pardon me, but you look somewhat fatigued."

How kind he was, and thoughtful! Mrs. Castlemon was used to attentions, in spite of her being Miss Hallston's chaperon and companion, but she never slighted a kindness, no matter from whom it came. That was her power over others.

"You are very good." She paused for a moment, looking very sweet, with a tender flush upon her cheeks. "Will you order a lemonade for me, Mr. Endicott? The heat is quite overpowering to-day, and I have been walking in the sunshine. Foolish, was it not?" Her smile was quite dazzling as she looked up to him from her seat in the shadow of the window.

"It is not wise to walk at this hour," he replied, with an answering smile. "You shall have the lemonade at once, Mrs. Castlemon."

She sat quite still when he had left her, watching the door leading from the rear of the house. Would that guide never come? Was he not there? Could Estelle not find him? What

might not this delay mean in the search for Edith? What might not Edith be suffering there, alone upon the mountain, while she sat in the shadow waiting for her lemonade! It was unbearable! She could have found the guide in less time herself! That girl, with her pretty face, would keep him chatting with her, when Edith might be in the utmost peril! What that peril was likely to be, she had no definite idea. She knew really so little of such danger.

Some one entered the door she was watching with such hungry eyes. Was it the guide? No. A wave of keenest disappointment swept over her face. She clenched her soft white hands in her lap in her excitement, but smiled coolly as Mr. Endicott approached her with a tiny tray bearing her order. The ice clicked as he set this down beside her, and in spite of her anxiety, the cool sound was refreshing.

"It is very good of you, Mr. Endicott," she said, softly. "You are always so thoughtful."

"Perhaps it is because you are so thoughtful of others yourself," he said, pleasantly. "It is

good to be remembered, you know, Mrs. Castlemon."

She lifted the glass to her lips and touched the contents, although at that moment she saw a man at the doorway that instinctively she knew for the man for whom she was waiting.

"That is one of your guides, isn't it, Mr. Endicott? I want him very much. We are to make up a party to climb the mountain soon, and I have to arrange about a guide. One has to engage them so long beforehand." Again she laughed, and beckoned for the man to approach, and as Mr. Endicott left her, the new-comer came up.

"You are Mrs. Castlemon? You sent for me?"

"Yes," she said, with as much graciousness as she gave to her warmest friend. "Sit down here for one moment, please; I have something to say to you." Her quick eye swept the room for any chance curiosity-seeker. No one was there save the clerk at the desk and Mr. Endicott, who had paused there to speak to him. Then she pushed aside the glass of lemonade, and leaned toward him.

“You are well acquainted with the opposite mountain, Mr. Daily?”

He nodded positively.

“As well as most on 'em, I guess.”

“Listen.” She spoke softly without a trace of excitement, save the flashing of her eyes into his, and told the story of Miss Hallston's disappearance, ending with:

“You know the mountain, you say. Is there danger in her going like this, Mr. Daily?”

He looked at and through her, as though he had forgotten her, his mind upon her words. Then he said, slowly:

“'Tain't likely she'll come out of it 'thout help, Mrs. Castlemon. 'Tain't a safe place, that mounting, 'specially for gals 'thout guides.”

“No!” She could have expected nothing else for answer, but she looked disappointed. “We wish no one here to know of this. There is no help in excitement, and Miss Hallston would not like it. You will start at once to search for her in the most likely places, Mr. Daily?”

“An' the gentlemen?”

“They started at once along the path that leads up the mountain, as being the most likely

one for her to take. But you are the one to go. Will you do so at once? Her friends will make it an object."

A grim smile stirred his lips. An amused twinkle came into his eyes.

"Hain't got no objection to going, Mrs. Castlemon, ma'am; but 'tain't a very likely job. Nevertheless, I'll go—I'll go at once. Miss Hallston is the young leddy with the bright eyes, and the smile and the pleasant voice? Yes; I thought I knew her. I'll go at once, ma'am."

"And you'll find her?"

"If I can." Then, seeing the swift flash of fear in her eyes, he added: "Don't you fret, Mrs. Castlemon, ma'am. I'll find her. It's easier finding her this time of day than though 'twas night." And with an awkward but hearty bow he left the office and the house.

Mrs. Castlemon, sitting at the window, watched him go down the lawn whistling unconcernedly, swinging his arms, his hat pushed back, his bronzed face in the sunlight, utterly disregarding the intense heat of the early afternoon. Then, sipping the last of the lemonade, she rose and went upstairs to her own room. She could

do no good had she wished to accompany the man. She must of necessity have hindered his speed. She could not endure to go upon the piazza, where their friends were. Her room, overlooking the mountain and the lake, was the best place for her in her present state.

The men at the desk watched her go from the room. Then Mr. Endicott turned to the other, saying :

“Remarkable woman, that! As gracious as she is beautiful, and there isn't much doubt of her beauty! I don't wonder Miss Hallston makes such a friend of her.”

“You're not struck, I hope, Endicott?” queried the other, quizzically.

Mr. Endicott laughed easily.

“No, not that, Gregory. She's the same to every one. She's that sort of woman, you know. A fellow can't help admiring her, but she wouldn't let you come nearer! She isn't one of your married flirts. But I say, have you noticed that queer way she and Montgomery have together? They fight shy of each other, I should say. He looks at her on the sly, when

she isn't looking, and she treats him with the most elaborate politeness; but there's something under it all, or, for once, I'm mightily mistaken!"

CHAPTER VIII.

WORDS WERE MADE TO CONCEAL THOUGHTS.

Out upon the mountain the heat was almost unbearable. The sun had reached the western slope, and was pouring down upon it through the thick growth of pine and spruce and tamarind, striking even the briars and tangle at the tree roots into withering. Scarcely a leaf stirred; scarcely a breath of wind touched the sweltering hills.

Over toward the sunset line, a huge bank of thunder-cloud, laden with threatening fire, loomed up and up slowly higher and higher. The blue heavens, against this black, frowning background, were deeply blue, but even that seemed to threaten the quietness of the day.

Not a cloud touched the ether save that one huge black thunder-boat riding up from the west. A threatening calm lay upon the lake and the mountain. Not a bird lifted its voice to cry from among the green stillness.

Allan Mansfield and Arthur Montgomery, almost overcome by the heat and the rush along the mountain-path, could not see the mounting cloud of storm at their backs. They would scarcely have thought of it twice, had they seen it. Their thoughts were upon the girl who had ventured along the ascent of the mountain, and who at that moment might be wandering farther and farther away from rescue and safety.

There was nothing to fear from the attack of wild animals, for there were none such in that region. Never, excepting in the most severe and trying winter, was there bear or wildcat seen in the woods. Sometimes, when the world was deep in snow, and there was no way for them to get food, these animals wandered nearer civilization, sometimes even appearing upon the roads, but seldom dangerous. They were more likely to seek to avoid men than run in their

way. It was only from the danger of being lost among the heavy trees, and wandering far away, even to the other side of the mountain, and making it almost impossible to find her, that they would rescue her. She was self-reliant and brave. This was their greatest difficulty, for she might stray further seeking new wonders, than she would were she timid.

By and by they paused and stood panting, eying each other in dismay. Afar off they caught the crack of a rifle and the deep baying of a hound. This meant possibly new danger to the girl. Was it not possible that, whoever these huntsmen might be, they might run across Miss Hallston without seeing her, and a ball from their rifles threaten her life?

“Think of it!” Allan exclaimed, hoarsely, wiping the beads of perspiration from his face with his handkerchief. “What shall we do now, Montgomery?”

Some way, this mutual effort of theirs to rescue Miss Hallston broke down the barrier of jealousy and unkindness, and they were comrades with one aim.

Mr. Montgomery, without speaking, leaned

forward to listen. He held up his hand to silence Allan, and showed signs of considerable excitement.

“What is it?” whispered Allan, unconscious of the fact that he had spoken in that tone. He leaned forward also to listen, and the excitement upon Mr. Montgomery’s face was reflected in his own. He started eagerly forward, regardless that his face and hands and clothing were torn and lacerated by their scramble through the underwood.

“Let’s shout,” said Allan, breathlessly, his eyes aflame.

“No;” and Mr. Montgomery showed the first sign of fear that had come upon him during their strange journey. “We might startle her if we shouted to her. She may be unconscious that she is lost, and such a course might end in our discomfiture. She would enjoy teasing us if she thought she could, and did not know how serious this matter is.”

Allan understood, and made no answer, as they struggled and slipped and scrambled up the path that had grown dangerously steep. Only by clinging to bending boughs and catch-

ing at briars and scraggy twigs could they make the ascent. To the girl, with her loose dress, it must be a hard climb indeed!

Above them they had heard the sharp crackling of twigs and the whirr of bushes parting and closing, and although it was as probable that this might be the approach of the hunters as of the girl, they chose to believe the latter, and hurried as fast as possible in the direction of the sound. It did not come from the path, but off to the left, in the densest part of the way, and to make their passage through this was at times impossible, and forced them to give way and find a more open road.

There was no sound of the girl's singing. She must long before have gotten past that, and the thought of this caused Allan's heart to quicken its beating, and his feet to hasten over the rough, slippery, treacherous moss and leaves and grasses. There was, in fact, not a sound nor a sign that would betray whether it were man or woman who stirred the silence of the forest with the breaking of boughs and the swinging of closing bushes.

"It's unbearable!" gasped Allan, catching his

footing by main strength of the arm that caught the sapling beside him as he slipped upon the edge of a sharp bank. Then he stooped suddenly forward and caught up something from a briar in front of him.

“What is it?” asked Mr. Montgomery, half guessing, without reply.

Allan held up a strip of soft dove-gray cloth with a scrap of pink ribbon upon it.

There was no need of words. Both men recognized the material as a part of the dress worn by Miss Hallston. This, at least, was something tangible to go upon. She had come up the mountain; there was no longer room to doubt that.

Then the two stepped through an opening in this wild tangle of briar and bough into an open square of smooth slope and moss and ferns. Their entrance made little noise. This was well, as they instantly recognized.

Miss Hallston did not hear them. She had seated herself upon a rock under the shade of a silver birch bough, whose leaves touched her uncovered head. She had tossed her hat upon the ground at her feet, and was arranging the

huge bunch of ferns and wild flowers and berries she had gathered. Her dress was torn, and her hands, moving among the bouquet, were scratched and bleeding; but her face was flushed, and there was a half smile upon her lips.

The men paused in silence, gazing at her. She had not the slightest knowledge of her danger, evidently. She sat as sweet and cool and self-possessed in the heart of the mountain tangle as she would in the parlor at the hotel. Then Allan, who was breathing hard, and flushed scarlet with the heat, reached out his arm and grasped his companion's arm in a grip like a vise. He seemed to have been turned suddenly into stone. Every vestige of color forsook his face. He was white as death.

Mr. Montgomery, turning toward him in surprise, instinctively followed the direction of his gaze. He, too, stood, as it seemed, rooted to the spot. There, upon the bough just above Miss Hallston's head, swinging with the deadly slow motion of a moving branch, hung a small, green, glistening snake, its tongue thrust out and in like lightning, its head slowly nearing the bent, bright head beneath.

“Look !” muttered Allan, in a smothered voice, that only his companion heard, as he loosened his hold of Mr. Montgomery’s arm and sprang forward.

Miss Hallston was but a couple of steps from them, and her back was turned toward them. She had neither heard nor seen them. At the sound of the springing steps upon the ground beside her she started, with a low cry.

Allan had calculated well in his spring, and had grasped the serpent with one muscular hand just at the back of the head, and, wrenching it from the bough, had crushed it under his heavy boot-heel. It lay, a ghastly sight, at the feet of the girl.

For one moment she stood, speechless and spell-bound, her eyes turning from the repulsive thing at her feet to the man beside her, whose swift action had saved her life. Their eyes met, and, for an instant, her soul met his, and a wild exultation and hope sprang to his face. Then, with a pretty shudder and grimace, she looked past Allan, a flash of wickedness in her eyes.

“Why wasn’t it *you* who saved my life, Mr. Montgomery ?” she said, calmly.

CHAPTER IX.

THREE ARE A CROWD.

For a moment Allan did not move. He stood with his eyes upon Miss Hallston as though he could not credit the hearing of his ears. That she could so turn upon him with her nonchalance, when he had just saved her life at the risk of his own, was past his comprehension. And to affirm that she would have preferred his rival to have saved her! Any one would have done what he did. It was nothing. No one would have stood inactive and seen the stroke that must have cost her her life. But that she could be so cruel to him whom, but one month before, she had claimed as one of her warmest friends was, perhaps, hardest to bear.

But if she was proud, so was he. If she could turn from death with a laugh upon her lips, so could he. If she could so clearly show her preference to his rival, so could he show her that he cared not at all. If she could treat him with

scorn and turn from him to Montgomery, so could he treat her. Pride went, perhaps, as well with a man as a woman!

It was cruel payment for his act, for it was a brave act, treat it as he would, and Arthur Montgomery felt a great pity in his heart for the man who stood so cold and so proud where the girl had turned from him. For Arthur Montgomery was a warm-hearted fellow, be he coward or hero. Besides, men admire courage and fair play. So he did not answer Edith's cool speech, but turned gravely to his friend—for he claimed Allan Mansfield as his friend, from that day—asking, with a slow distinctness that the girl could not fail to understand, and that brought a deeper color to her cheeks:

“Are you hurt, Mansfield?”

He laid his hand on Allan's broad shoulder with unspeakable kindness in look and voice. But Allan could not bear pity at that desperate moment, and shook off the friendly hand with a chilling laugh, a half sneer marring the usually frank mouth under the fair mustache.

“Don't trouble yourself, Montgomery,” he said, lightly. “It is nothing, I assure you. Any

“LOOK!” MUTTERED ALLAN, IN A SMOTHERED VOICE.—See Page 126.



one would have done the same. If you are not too much fatigued, we had better return. It will be harder going down than coming up, as we lost our reckoning in our hurry. We'll have to judge from the sun. That is the only way we can hope to come out within a mile of our destination. It is stifling here!"

Mr. Montgomery, like a true friend, would not be daunted by a few cold words. He laid his hand on Allan's arm with some authority and pressed him down, as he said, sternly:

"I will not stir one step from here till you have rested, Mansfield. You are as pale as a ghost. Are you sure that devil did not touch you—"

Allan interrupted him calmly. He obeyed the strong hand and stern voice, but he laughed as he sank down upon the rock from which Edith had started in her surprise.

"You make too much of this, Montgomery!" he said. "It is no more than you would have done if I had given you the chance. It is to be regretted that you did not do it. It would have given you a double hold upon Miss Hallston's friendship. I seem to have been unfortunate in

losing it. Nevertheless," he shrugged his shoulders and lifted his brows gayly, "'What's one man's loss is another man's gain,' you know. I declare, I am pretty well tired out! That was a tough struggle up the hill, wasn't it?"

He scarcely knew what he was saying, but he would give the girl no opportunity to speak. Her words were few indeed, but they were enough. She should have no further chance to wound him.

But, know Edith Hallston as he thought he did, he never guessed one-half her depth and force of character. She could be generous as well as cruel. She was a woman in every true sense of the word. She was as brave in her way as was he, even as he could prove to her how utterly unmindful he was of her cruelty. With but an instant's hesitation she crossed the space between them, and held out both her hands, a lovely color surging into her face, a soft pleading in the lifted eyes.

"As an admirer of good-natured people, I am an utter failure," she said, with an attempt at a laugh, though it broke and faltered and

broke down all these fine barriers he had been building to meet her pride. "It was hateful in me to say that, Mr. Mansfield! I am so sorry—so very, very sorry! Do you think you can forgive me? We used to be such good friends."

This last small plea carried away every vestige of harsh feeling he had let into his heart during the last few minutes. His face flushed, too, and her two extended hands were clasped closely in his with a warmth she could not misunderstand, as he answered, a ring of gladness in his voice, though he spoke very low :

"We *are* good friends so far as I am concerned, and could never be otherwise, Miss Hallston. Only you must acknowledge, it wasn't nice of you to tell me to my face that you would have preferred having Mr. Montgomery kill that snake! Indeed it wasn't nice of you, and you must acknowledge that! It was downright mean, and I didn't think Miss Hallston could be mean!"

"I told you once that I could be awfully hateful, don't you remember that?" she asked, leaving her hands in his. She would not be hard

with him again. He had saved her life, and in a manner different than even the daring plunge Mr. Montgomery took for her, that day on the lake. Some way it was very nice to feel that she owed him this debt of gratitude. "But—" all this lovely flushing and smiling and shy, sweet lifting of those beautiful eyes was for him—"But I didn't *mean* it, as you must have known, Mr. Mansfield! I couldn't have meant it, you know!"

All this was very pretty and decidedly interesting for those concerned in it, but for another fellow to stand by and see the fun, was not so delightful. Mr. Montgomery was a good-natured man, and glad that this reconciliation had taken place, but it came into his head before it came into the heads of the others, that they should start upon their return as soon as possible. So he ventured this remark in as conciliatory a manner as was consistent with the great demand there was for haste.

"Oh, I say, you two, don't you think it advisable that we get back pretty soon? It's nearly four o'clock, and unless we do go Miss Hallston will miss the dinner! Of course, they'd keep it

for us, but it won't be half so good. Besides, to my mind, it's cooler on the hotel piazza than among this abominable briar!"

Edith laughed wickedly. She drew her hands from Allan's and shook out her dress with considerable unnecessary elaboration. Then she stooped for the bouquet that fell scattering upon the ground at their sudden appearance.

"You poor Mr. Montgomery! Even the boot-legs haven't sufficed for a day's rations! You are still longing for the good roast-beef and dessert of civilization? You are not even reconciled by the lionization to follow our return from shipwreck?"

He and Allan were helping her regain her flowers and ferns. Not a cloud seemed to touch their light hearts.

"And you didn't know that you were lost?" asked Mr. Montgomery, with considerable relish, in return for her sarcasm. "You didn't know that if we hadn't come in search of you, you might never have returned to civilization, Miss Hallston?"

She glanced up with a startled expression on her face, and then laughed. He was only teas-

ing her, she told herself. He could tease her sometimes with his appearance of truth, speaking in his grave manner.

“But, as we found you,” Allan hastened to add, catching this fear on her face, “it is all right, Miss Hallston! But, perhaps, it would be as well to hurry a bit. It wouldn’t be particularly pleasant to have darkness come down upon us among these trees and brambles. It wouldn’t be exactly an easy thing to find our way out. I had to stay through one night out here, last summer, and although the mountain is safe enough, so far as that goes, it is much more comfortable at the hotel. It is chilly and damp, and rather—of course, this would amount to nothing really with such brave company—but it is rather ghostly in the dark. So we may as well follow your advice, Montgomery. It isn’t bad advice.”

Mansfield took the lead and stood aside, holding back an inquisitive bramble, that she might pass through the way they had come, Montgomery of Canada following. Their eyes met in that straight, full look that always set his pulses throbbing highly.

“It isn’t the easiest thing in the world to find

one's way back from any given starting-point here," he said, quietly. "Men who have thought themselves familiar with the place, have been lost before now, Miss Hallston. It is the thick boughs, you see, and the heavy undergrowth. You cannot at this moment point out the location of the hotel. You could not even accurately tell where lies the lake!"

So, she owed her life equally to these two men. One saved her from drowning; the other—she shuddered at thought of the possible death so near her. Both had saved her from—yes, even from death, it might be, there on the mountain, in sight of the hotel. How strange it was to know she had been so near death more than once within such short time, and that these two men had come between that and her.

"I never dreamed of that!" she said, softly, and she bent her head in passing him through the opening in the tangle he made for her. She would not have him know just yet how much this was to her. But did she dream he could not read the drooping, tender face so near him?

Silence fell upon them for awhile. The thoughts arising from their few words set a

swift current adrift, and conversation died out. Besides, they had to choose their way of return with more care than the two men had chosen in their hurried search. They could not lead Miss Hallston through the dense tangles and rocky bursts and slippery banks over which they had passed, regardless of themselves. The easiest way must be found for her, if there were any easy way down that mountain. They dared not hasten too swiftly either, for they must pause now and then to get their bearings.

A new danger threatened them, too, at this juncture. Allan had noticed the darkening of the sunlight and the ominous stillness upon everything; but he would not speak of this to depress his companions. Then, too, his heart was too light at that time to be easily cast down by any threatening of weather. That a thunderstorm was rising swiftly, he knew; but it might be their good fortune to reach the hotel before it should break. They must reach shelter before then, he told himself, with a determined setting of his lips, ere the rain should come. It would be pretty rough for them if caught in the woods.

But this ominous darkness at last made itself

felt by the others. Mr. Montgomery, meeting Allan's eyes at one time in descending a slight bank, lifted his brows questioningly, and was made no lighter-hearted by the slight affirmative nod he received. Even Edith paused presently, and turned upon them with swift thought.

"What is the matter?" she asked, anxiously. "What makes it so dark all at once, Mr. Mansfield? Are you certain your watch is right, Mr. Montgomery? You said it was four o'clock, didn't you, back there? We haven't been long coming this far, and it can't be later than that! Is it," a sudden intelligence flashing in her eyes, striking a fear in them also, for if she was a coward at any time, it was during a thunder-storm. "Is it"—she caught her breath with a swift fear—"a shower coming up? Are we in danger of being caught out here? Oh, this is dreadful! Why did I come? Why didn't I wait, as you all advised me to, until we could go up some day together! Poor, dear Mrs. Castlemon will be so frightened for me! She knows what a coward I am at such a time! Oh, I don't see why I didn't wait and have some common sense. I might have known I couldn't get up there

without some one to show me! I might have believed *you*, at least." She mentioned no name, but her eyes were upon Allan's, and sent him to the seventh heaven with alacrity. "And I have brought you here—you will be caught in it, too—we all will, maybe, be lost—" She was growing somewhat incoherent. Her eyes were eloquently looking into Allan's, but this was not particularly comforting to Mr. Montgomery.

Allan laughed easily, and lifted her down from the bank as though she were a child instead of a young woman of considerable weight. It was very necessary that he should place her carefully upon her feet, and this was not to be done in one short instant of time. He could feel her heart throbbing against his arm, her soft hands upon his shoulders.

"If we are careful and do not lose our heads, we will get back in time," he said, calmly. "As to you being a coward, Miss Hallston, we know better than that. You have proved otherwise, I am sure."

"You've never had an opportunity of judging," she said, quite fretfully. "I *am* dreadfully afraid of thunder and lightning, and the wind

that comes with them! I think I shall just die of them if we don't hurry and get home before they reach us!"

"It would take some time for the rain to reach us, if it does come, Miss Hallston," said Mr. Montgomery. "The boughs are so thick and close, we can escape much of the rain. But it is scarcely likely to occur, I assure you. We have still a good half hour of grace."

"But we never can get down there in half an hour," still protested the sweet, querulous voice. "I'm afraid of thunder and lightning, and you can't change me any more than you can make the storm wait till we get home. I just wish I had stayed with you. Don't you ever let me do such a foolish thing again, Mr. Mansfield! Why didn't you tell me I mustn't come?"

He felt an insane desire to laugh at the possibility of his detaining her in the mood she had been in, but he would not allow the slightest quiver of his lips to betray him. Instead, he paused in the path to look about them. Some way, that did not look like the path they had followed as best they could, going up. If only the sun were shining, that he could judge of

their direction. But overhead was darkness intense, and not a break of light showed above to betray where the west lay. This darkness was creeping down under the pines stealthily, and would cast midnight upon them in thirty minutes. Those swift, terrible mountain storms were to be dreaded in such a position as theirs.

CHAPTER X.

OUT FROM THE NOCTURNAL SEA.

Allan knew what was threatening them better than his companions, and, knowing, felt a chill upon him ; but he must keep this knowledge from Miss Hallston, at least, and if Montgomery did not know, at least there was bliss in ignorance. There was no wind stirring save a deep, hoarse growl of the motion of swinging boughs far above them toward the mountain-top. There was no break in the clouds, as one could catch glimpses of them through the branches, to betray which was their course toward home.

The path looked strange. It was not even crushed nor crumpled, as their path must have been.

All heard that vast sighing overhead, and Miss Hallston's face grew white in the deepening gloom. She laid her hand on Allan's arm, as though to be certain of companionship if harm were coming upon them. Not even the thirty minutes would be granted them, Allan said to himself, with the same grim determination to take things that must come, as he had the previous night, when waiting in that little room, in the house among the woods, for what might come! Not even thirty minutes to get to safety! Hurry as they would, they could not get to the hotel, even in a straight course, in less than that time. Under the circumstances it was impossible to tell how long it might take them. He could not place their location; he could not decide whether they should go straight down to the foot of the mountain or keep on in the direction in which they were facing. If that sunshine had lasted, they would have been much more certain of their reaching their starting-point within an hour. There were so many

things to contend against, especially now that darkness was gathering. For himself he could manage; even Montgomery would doubtless get through all right: but for a woman it was an ordeal that he would have done much to prevent. The woods in such a storm would be to her terrible, indeed. There was even the possibility of that swift flame of death passing through the trees, with horror in its breath! There was the attraction of the tall trees lifting their heads as though in defiance toward that very fire that would sweep them from its path when it should turn from the clouds and fall toward them.

Allan's face was almost as white as Miss Hallston's as he stood in that one moment of time taking in the possibilities of this adventure. The girl's eyes did not leave his face, and she seemed to read in it even more than she had feared. As for Montgomery, he was biting his under-lip savagely, as though he was unconscious of what he was doing. As for the report of the rifle upon the mountain and the baying of hounds, they had forgotten them. That others might be in the same peril as they, did not occur to them. Then Allan shrugged his

shoulders as though it were very little matter about the storm, and said, with a laugh, and quite steadily :

“The best thing we can do is to try and reach that bower of ours below there. It will give us good shelter if the storm should overtake us. Of course, we will try to outwit it, but if there should be no way, we can play the shipwrecked mariner in earnest under cover of those trees. It will be quite comfortable, and we will keep drier. It will spoil your pretty dress, Miss Hallston, but it can't be helped.”

She knew quite well he was putting on this brave face for her, and it gave her courage. She gathered up her dress with one hand, ready for a run, if that should be necessary, and tried to laugh with her old nonchalance.

“It's no great moment about my dress,” she said. “I can replace that easier than a head, if the lightning should deprive me of that! I tell you, I am the most dreadful coward in a shower! I am always sure and certain that every flash of lightning is for the express purpose of taking my life! To be sure, it never

has; but if it doesn't some time, I shall believe it is because I am reserved to drown!"

"Or drown somebody else!" said Allan, trying to keep up the farce of cheerfulness. "You have already threatened me, so I should be prepared."

"It seems to me, though, that it would be as well to prevent either occurrence, if possible," said Mr. Montgomery, in a strange voice. "I think you would find neither particularly comfortable!" He was not only biting his lip in that savage manner, but there was a strange expression in his eyes, and a dark, bluish hue upon his face.

Allan started when he looked at him. Was this evidence of his cowardice? Deland told him he was a coward, in spite of having saved Edith's life at the risk of his own. To be sure, he had been brave in this struggle of theirs to find Edith, but it might be that such things had no terror for him. After all, it might not be bravery that drove him to save the girl in the lake. There was a certain excitement about it that might counterbalance the risk. Surely, the

man with that terrible look upon his face was not brave.

But that was no time nor place to argue out such a point of character, no matter how interesting it might be. The storm was lowering, and threatening present destruction. There was a long, deep, awful peal of thunder, as though the earth were shaken to its foundation, a flash of vivid, bluish-pink flame cutting the heavens from end to end, seeming to rend the earth and sky; a mad sweep of torrent wind down from the heights, bearing a sheet of rain and hail, and the storm was indeed upon them! Edith uttered a low cry of abject terror, and clung to Allan with both trembling hands, as though he could shield her from the world and its demon spirits; and with an effort he regained his self-command—for the sudden burst of the storm had shaken his strongest determination to be brave—and catching her hand, with a shout for Montgomery to follow them, he hurried down the path recklessly, determined to find some shelter for the girl, whether in the homeward route or not.

The thought came to Allan, as they hurried

along through the rain and wind and thunder, that this summering had opened most inauspiciously, and if it should follow its beginning—But he would allow himself no such train of thought at such a time. He must give his attention to saving Edith from more discomfort than was absolutely necessary. If they were only in the right path—one could distinguish almost nothing at such a time—they should reach the group of pines where they had lunched such a short time before, with the glaring sunshine upon the world, and that would shelter them considerably from the worst of the storm.

“It’s all right for us fellows,” he said to himself, as he dragged Miss Hallston along through the dripping bushes that sent showers of icy rain upon them, along the path where the long grass, already drenched, swept their feet and dragged her skirts. “It’s all very well for us, but it’ll never do for her. I’d give considerable if we had never ventured out to-day! What a terrible thing it would be”—he was growing gloomy in his thoughts—“if the black fate that seems to have chosen me should fall upon those I love! If *she*—”

He glanced back over his shoulder in search of Montgomery, as this thought came to him. But Montgomery was not to be seen. Allan could not believe his eyes. Even in the pelting rain he stopped short to listen, as though he could have hoped to hear anything other than the thunder and the wind and the rain. Edith was doubly frightened by the expression of his face. He shouted, but there was no answer. He shouted again and waited, but still the storm alone rocked the world. He was more startled than he cared to own. Why, he did not know and could not have explained. The proceedings of the previous night flashed back upon him. Could those robbers have been upon that mountain and have waylaid the man? Could any harm have come to him through a false step? Would he not have shouted, had such a thing occurred?

Edith was tremblingly clinging to him in her terror, her beautiful face pallid as death, the lightning flashing in her terrified eyes, the thunder causing her to shrink closer to her companion for courage and strength. Looking down upon her, his face as white as her own, Allan

regained his self-control, and seeing nothing of their companion in another searching glance over the path they had come, he once more hurried Edith on through the storm and darkness. He must not betray to her what his fear was. To utter one word of the dread he possessed in the disappearance of their friend, would bring death not only upon himself—had not the woman said it?—but the death of the one nearest and dearest to him. Had she some power of knowing what the future held that she should have given him that warning? Were not he and the one dearest to him alone upon the mountain, so far as companionship went? If he breathed to her his fear and his adventure, might there not come some terrible vengeance upon them both?

He shuddered as he thought of it. He held, still closer in his, the small trembling hand that was like a bird in its trembling, as though it would escape were there not some power beyond itself that held it back. He smiled grimly as this fancy came to him. The poor, little, harmless bird that might so easily be destroyed at one word of a broken vow. How could that other woman have threatened harm

to her? Did she know of whom she spoke in making him swear by his hope in her?—by his love and his care for her?

But the storm continued and the rain swept the mountain-side like an avalanche, and still they did not come to the bower, nor to any ending of the treacherous path. Still the little, cold hand lay in his for help and courage, and they hurried along under the dripping boughs and the drenched underbrush, with the thunder rocking the earth, and the lightning ploughing the heavens with its sword of flaming bluish-pink.

At that moment the path terminated, so far as they could see, in an embankment some six feet deep, and they paused on the edge to regain breath ere making the descent. Then, as Allan, who had reached the foot of the bank, was reaching up to receive Edith in his arms, the rain pelting full in his white face, the thunder crashing and rolling along the heavens like some great chariot-wheel, there came a swift flash from a revolver, a sharp report, and Allan, who had slipped upon the slippery bank and was regaining his footing, felt a swift pain across his

temple and unconsciously staggered. Still lifting his arms for Edith, he called to her to hurry, and she obeyed.

As he set her upon her feet, steadying her with one arm, he mechanically lifted his hand to his head where that strange sensation of pain was, wondering vaguely what the cause might be. As he removed his hand, a vivid glare of lightning struck through the trees, surrounding them in a ghostly light, while the deafening thunder, crashing overhead, stifled Edith's cry of terror.

"Allan!" He was somehow bewildered, and could not clear himself from the dazed feeling that had fallen upon him, but her voice struck to his very soul. "Allan! Allan! What is the matter? What has happened? See!—look! There is blood upon your hand!"

And then, and only then, did he realize that he had been shot!

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

With Edith still clinging to him, this new terror upon her face, Allan stood for a moment too dazed to move or speak. Was this confirmation of his fear for Montgomery? Were robbers indeed upon the mountain? Was Montgomery in their power, and would they, in spite of the woman, be revenged upon him, and through him harm the girl at his side? Would they take the chances with the terrible storm to leave no trace of their work?

“Allan!” cried Edith, for he had not answered her, and there was that in his face that drove from her mind any hard thought she may have held toward him, and left only tenderest pity. “What is it? Who has hurt you?” In the thunder of the storm she had not heard the shot.

Allan, looking down upon her, tried to command himself, but all thought was confused.

He lifted his hand to his head, and the pain that struck along his nerves as he laid his hand upon the wound brought him to his senses. It was clear enough then. He had been shot, whether intentionally or not, he must wait to know ; but the girl beside him must be gotten out of the way of possible harm from other than the terrors of the storm.

“I am all right, Edith,” he said ; but there was a strange sound to his voice, and the smile he forced upon his lips was worse to the girl than the deepest gravity would have been. He could not choose his words ; his tongue would not obey his will ; but his mind was so filled with the desire to lighten her fear that he spoke whatever came to his mind. “You need not fear for me, dearest,” he said, and the pale face flushed in the gloom like the heart of a rose at the gentle word. “I shall be myself presently. It is nothing. A scratch, you see, and bleeds worse than the hurt. Some hunter, I suppose, shooting at random—”

“You are shot, Allan !” Even the crash of thunder following upon the deadly flash of lightning at that moment could not make her flinch

with this fear upon her. She was drenched, but scarcely knew it. With a woman's unselfishness, she was not thinking of herself. Her thought for him was swift. Drawing her handkerchief from her pocket, she quickly folded it into a bandage.

"It is wet—everything is wet now, Allan," she said; and although she was forced to speak loud on account of the tumult around them, yet her voice was heavenly sweet to him. "Let me bind this on the wound. It *must* be bound, you know."

Her authority was most delightful. He stooped, that she could reach him, for he was a good head and shoulders above her, and steadied her with his arms as she reached up, laying the soft morsel of linen over the wound, and tied it carefully, but with nervous fingers, around his head. His eyes were upon her face, but she would not meet them, a sudden sense of shyness making her afraid to look into his eyes. She would not have been a woman not to know that the man loved her; but now that he would tell her, she would avoid it if she could.

What did they care for the rain or the thun-

der or fire of the heavens? It was sweet to have her thought only for him, and to know that such a woman loved him but he, too, hesitated in telling her what was so near his lips. She had been a warm friend to him for over a year, though there were times when she tested his friendship to the utmost; but he had never asked of her the return of love for love, and as the words would rise to his lips some unaccountable sense of unworthiness kept them back.

She asked for his handkerchief, and he gave it to her. Softly and tenderly she wiped the blood from his cheek where it was flowing slowly down, her face quivering and her eyes dilating with fear for his comfort.

“It is dreadful to see you—like—like this,” she ventured, faintly, and now the old pallor returned to her cheeks and lips. For it was a rather ghastly sight—that blood upon his face in the glare of the lightning. She tried to draw herself gently away, but he held her firmly. That sense of bewilderment had gone; he was himself again. He smiled into the uplifted face with the touch of storm upon it. He even for-

got Montgomery's disappearance for the moment.

"Then you do care?" he asked. It was a most useless question, and he knew it, but it was sweet to have her sympathy.

"Of course I care," she said, quietly. "Wouldn't you care if a friend were hurt, Mr. Mansfield?"

"And only a friend?" he asked, wickedly. "And only Mr. Mansfield?"

The storm was dying in the distance. Long rolls of thunder reverberated over the hills. The lightning flashed, but fainter and farther away. The storm could not frighten her now. Now that it was passing, they could find their way back to the hotel, and all would be well, if only this hurt of his did not amount to anything serious. The thought of harm brought the swift tenderness to her face again; and his eyes, searching that same face, knew of her thought.

There was a loud crashing of boughs and the trampling of feet through the softened rain. Miss Hallston and Mr. Mansfield were, of course, still searching for the homeward path as soon as that sound fell upon their ears. It would not

do to let the world know how happy they were, and how much they were to each other, under those ridiculous circumstances. The world would laugh at them. Neither of them cared to be teased and laughed at, when they should only be happy.

“It is Montgomery!” said Allan, ere he caught sight of the scrambling person through the wet boughs. “He got behind, you know, and for a moment I thought he was lost. Eh! hello! is that you, Montgomery?” His voice was as steady and strong as though nothing had happened to so startle him such a few moments before, and he turned in the direction of the sound, hoping and believing that it was the man he wished to see.

But it was not Montgomery. The tall, big, broad-shouldered fellow, with his trousers tucked into his boots, and the short jacket and soft hat, was not Montgomery. He was torn by the underbrush, and somewhat the worse for the rain, as were the two he came upon; but he looked capable of surviving many worse things than that.

“Oh!” There was great disappointment in

Allan's voice. "You're not the man I thought. We're lost, somehow. Can you tell me how to get to the carry just below the hotel across the lake? Why, I'll be blest if it isn't Daily! You couldn't have been any one we would rather see had you tried! How did you come here? Mrs. Castlemon sent you, eh? I forget she went for a guide, though I knew it at the time. Well, the lost young lady is found, but the joke of it is that those who found her are as lost as she could possibly be! This storm, you see, knocked all reckoning out of my brain. Get us out of this at once, will you?"

"There was another chap with you?" began the guide. "Mrs. Castlemon said there were two of you gone to look for her," nodding his head in Edith's direction.

There was a warning in Allan's eyes which the quick-witted fellow understood. He nodded without waiting for a reply, and started ahead of the others, straight out of the path they had been following, and turned to the right where the underbrush was thinner.

"You was goin' exactly in the contrary direction to what you should have gone," he

said, grimly. "It is powerful easy to get lost on this 'ere mountain, and I don't wonder at your doing so. Most folks does that try going off without a guide. 'Tain't safe. Them as has once tried it never do it again. You're hurt, though," said Daily, catching sight of the blood under the bandage on the young man's head. He had noticed the handkerchief, but thought little of it in the rain and the general confusion of nature. "How did it happen, and how bad is it? Ran against a sharp twig, eh?"

"No!" Edith's voice was sharp and abrupt. The man turned to her in astonishment. "He did not hurt himself at all, Mr. Daily. Somebody else gave him that wound. We don't know who it was. He was helping me down a bank, and the next I knew there was this cut across his forehead, and blood on his hand, when he went to touch the wound. Do you think it could have been some stray shot, as he says, that could have done it, or was there any one—" She could not finish that sentence, and stopped with a slowly whitening face. She had not before thought of the possibility of intentional harm to her friend.

The guide looked at her sharply and then at Allan. This was an original way of getting wounded. Still it was possible—yes, even probable, in this case, that this was the cause of the wound. Only—and here he shrugged his shoulders with an air of exasperating doubt—if it were from the chance shot of some hunter among the woods, it did certainly seem strange that there was no sign of such a person afterward. It was nothing to him, though, of course. If these people wanted to think so, it was all right for them to think so, but for his part—

“I didn’t notice the shot,” said Edith, presently, made somehow uncomfortable by the guide’s manner. “The storm was so dreadful, I never knew a thing about it till Mr. Mansfield put his hand to his head and there was blood upon it! He looked so awful, too, that I was dreadfully frightened, but I didn’t know what to do except to bind it up. Did I do it right, Mr. Daily?”

“It’ll do well enough for now,” he said, still with that exasperating shrug of his shoulders, and the side glance at Edith that made her feel

uncomfortable. As though he suspected *her*, she told herself. "When you get up to the house, though, I'd advise him to get it fixed right off. "'Tain't in a special nice place for a bullet wound. Maybe you don't know much about bullet wounds, though, miss?" he added, and Edith shrank from the evil look of his eyes. "They're kinder bad things to have, let me tell you, and some times lead to worse."

"What does he mean?" cried the girl, turning to Allan, in unaccountable terror. "*Are* you hurt badly, Mr. Mansfield? Do you feel worse again? Lean on me, if you are faint. I am very strong and can help you, you don't know how much! Just try me—please do—and see! This has been so hard for you, and if I had not been so headstrong, it would never have happened—"

Allan stopped further self-reproach. He could not bear to see the sweet face so grieved over what may have been the one chance he needed to be sure of her thought for him. He laughed gayly at thought of leaning upon

her, as though instead she ought to lean upon him.

“My foolish child,” he said, in an undertone, smiling upon her, “you need have no fear for me indeed! This is but a scratch, and we will have it put to rights as soon as we get back to the hotel. It looks far worse, let me tell you, than it feels. There, are you satisfied about it, or will you wait till some one else tells you the same?”

It was good to have him talking so lightly about it, but it did not change her fear. He was saying that for her as she would have said it for him in his place, and he could not blind her eyes. She would not let the guide hinder her gentle offices of nurse when he needed help. So she went to him and drew his arm across her shoulder and steadied it with her two hands; and, although the beautiful color flushed into her cheeks, she did not falter nor look ashamed. Why should she? Would she not help any one in need of her assistance?

The guide looked most unbelievably upon all this show of solicitude, but he kept his lips shut over any word he might have uttered, and

strode on down the dripping mountain as though there were no spirit of love in the wide world.

“He’s a fool to believe her!” he said to himself; but, as he fashioned the thought in his mind, the girl’s face was turned to him, alight with its sweetness and mobility, and the words died ere they passed his lips. He could not bring himself to utter such a thought with her eyes upon him.

The path seemed very simple, following the guide; and although the storm was broken, and the clouds in the west were drifting before the breeze that was born in the storm-wind’s train, yet the sun had not struggled through when they once more stood by the bower beside the lake. Here Allan looked at his watch, and found it was half after five. It must have been nearly an hour since Montgomery left them. Where might he not have gone, or what might not have befallen him in that time?

With this in his mind Allan turned to the guide.

“We know where we are now, Daily,” he said, quietly. “We will have no difficulty in getting

back to the hotel. Will you go back for Mr. Montgomery, or shall I send some one from over there?"

He motioned with his head toward the house, and kept his eyes upon the man's face. He was a good-looking fellow, but there was something in his face that did not altogether suit Allan.

"Do you think he lost track of us?" asked Edith, earnestly, searching his face. "How selfish I have been! I never really thought he was gone astray, and yet there is every reason to think so. Poor, kind Mr. Montgomery! Suppose anything has happened to him during that terrible lightning?"

"Daily will find him, if he goes," said Allan, reassuringly, but in his heart he began to doubt whether or no Daily would find him. So much of mystery was around him that he began to fear it would not end with his friend so well as he would hope. Had not harm befallen him upon the high road, only the night before? And was it not likely some part of that band of robbers and murderers would be anywhere where there was likelihood of gaining anything? Might they not even have known of their lunching

there that day, and, still no friend to him in spite of being forced to let him go from their hold, might it not be that some "stray bullet" from them might be the wound upon his forehead?

Those thoughts made his eyes very grave, more grave than he knew, and the guide's eyes were sharp. They were too sharp and too black Edith thought, turning from him with a sense of dislike she could not have explained.

"He hasn't said that he will go," she said, quite as calmly as Allan had spoken. "He may not care for another climb in the rough weather, Mr. Mansfield!"

Was it scorn in her voice? The man looked at her intently. Then he lifted his head proudly.

"I did not know that I was ever asked to find any one who was lost on this mountain that I refused to do it, Miss Hallston!" he said, with an air that would have been impertinent from any other. "I will leave you here, if you know the way to the house, and if Mr. Montgomery can be found, he will be found."

"All right, Daily," said Allan, cheerily. "I wish you luck, man. We missed him just a few

minutes before you came up with us. He should be traced from there, as you traced us."

"I saw no other trace," said the man, doggedly, as he turned away. "I followed the only one I saw. That was yours. But if he is to be found, he will be found."

"Do you think anything really serious could have happened to him, Mr. Mansfield?" queried Edith, anxiously, as they went on together beside the lake, now in sight of the hotel. "I am so very, very sorry for what I have done! I could not know what would come of it, of course; but it would have been wiser to have taken the advice of those who knew more about what I was talking than I did."

"Of course, you could not know," said Allan, decisively, without a moment's hesitation. He had removed his hand from her shoulder, and was walking quite steadily beside her, but she could not know the pain he was suffering. It was so strange why such a slight wound should affect him as that did. That was not the first time he had had a bullet wound. "Besides," and now he smiled upon her, "if you had not run away from us and led us a pretty chase, it

might be that you would not have been so kind to me as you have been, Edith. I shall tell you more fully what I have to say, if you will let me, by and by. There is no need to tell you that I love you, for you already know that ; but I have a question to ask you, the reply to which will change the world for me."

She laughed softly, to mislead him as to how much this was to her, and said, with a bewitching gravity :

"I will do my best for you, Mr. Mansfield. Did you not save my life?"

An excited group were upon the piazza as Edith and Allan approached the hotel. Mrs. Castlemon was among them, and ran down the steps, regardless of her pretty, thin slippers and the wet grass, in her excitement.

"Edith! You poor, dear, lost child! You can have no idea what I have endured since noon! But to have you safe—But in what a condition! Soaked through, of course! Then you did not find shelter, as we hoped against hope. Of course some of our friends know of it, for I could not tell lies, you know, and say you were here when you had absolutely not come. And when

that dreadful storm came—” She shuddered, and would not speak of it further. She had her arm around the girl, and was half carrying her up the steps, where their friends were waiting for them.

“What is the matter with you, Mr. Mansfield?” She caught sight of the tell-tale blood upon the bandage on his head, and the color fled from her cheeks. “You are hurt. I am so sorry. How did it happen? And where is Mr. Montgomery, Edith?” She asked this more as though it were because she was never thoughtless of any one, than as though she cared to hear, and a restlessness came into the soft black eyes that turned from Mr. Mansfield to Edith. “It is so sad that our pretty luncheon party ended as it has. I hope you are not seriously hurt, Mr. Mansfield.”

“Oh, no!” He was in haste to deny this, and as much in haste to get to his room, for he was growing strangely faint and sick. “It is really nothing, Mrs. Castlemon. You will pardon me if I suggest that Miss Hallston be attended to at once? She has been exposed to the worst of the storm, and I fear a heavy cold, unless she has

dry clothing at once and something hot to drink—”

He was growing rather incoherent, and Deland, who was among the group, catching sight of him, and comprehending his state of mind, caught him by the arm and hurried him off out of sight of the rest.

“Come up to your room, old fellow!” he said. “Got a deuced ducking, didn’t you? Ha! ha! But I say, that was a mighty queer freak of Miss Hallston’s tramping off up the mountain by herself! She should have known she could not do it, nor find her way back! Women are such queer creatures! Eh, Mansfield?”

He did not wait for replies, as he hurried his friend through the office and up the staircase. He was too well aware of the need of haste, as though Mansfield had told him in a million words. He was something of a surgeon, was Deland.

“We went over to Saranac all right, and returned your horse; but whatever possessed you to hire the nag and never get here till this morning beats me! It’s your own business

though, of course. I'm not finding fault with you. You're at liberty to do as you like, I'm sure, only it won't be well for you to get many such blows as this, I can tell you, old fellow! Where'd you get it, and what had you done to deserve it?"

He had Allan in his room, and was assisting him with all speed to change his wet clothing. He did not attempt to touch the wound until this was done.

"Oh, yes, you'd like to get into your evening dress and go down to dinner, but you're going to do nothing of the sort, my dear chap! You are to get into your downy bed as fast as you can get there, and do exactly as I tell you. You needn't open your mouth to expostulate, for when the decree has gone forth there is no changing it. I tell you, unless you do as I tell you we will have a grand case of brain-fever on our hands. Maybe you don't believe it. I tell you it is true. Come now, do as I tell you, Mansfield! Don't give us any more trouble than is necessary."

"Don't alarm yourself," said Allan, laughing, as he obeyed, nevertheless, for Deland was too

much for him. "One would think me a baby the way you coddle me, Deland!"

"Oh, well, so you are," was the cool retort.

"Now then, Mansfield, if you're ready, I should like to see this noble wound of battle!"

He untied tenderly the soft shred of handkerchief which Edith had tied with such careful fingers. The wound had bled considerably, and adhered to the cloth as he endeavored to remove it. A frown came upon Deland's brow.

"'Twouldn't be a bad idea," he said, calmly, "to have some hot water here, Mansfield, and bathe this thing till the cloth comes off. I can get it off as it is, but that would only needlessly irritate the wound. It's quite an ugly cut, isn't it? What were you doing with fire-arms out there, if you please?"

"Nothing." Allan did not particularly care whether he had warm water applied to his head or a knife. In its present state it seemed to him it could not by any possibility be more painful than it was. Besides, he was too drowsy to half understand what his friend was saying.

Deland comprehended this, and went on doing as he proposed, without further argument, although he kept up the one-sided conversation. Some of Deland's friends had the ill-nature to say that he would keep up a running conversation on his death-bed.

"There!" Deland had the basin of hot water at hand and was bathing Allan's head as softly as a woman could. "That is better, I know, old boy. Its mother shall put it to sleep presently, if it's a good child. And so you had no other amusement but trying to blow your brains out over there, eh? That isn't a half-good idea, Mansfield. Do you know there are other modes of blessing humanity without such bloody deeds as this! A thirty-two caliber, too, I should say. And an ugly wound," he added to himself, as he softly bathed the other's head.

Allan's eyes were closing, and Deland, who had the gaze of a hawk, went on calmly doing his work and conversing with himself, as though Allan were as wide awake as he.

"I should think it anything but gay to start on a picnic and return with a blood-and-thunder air such as this," he said, his fingers as light as

the tenderest nurse. "Now that's off as well as we can get it, and we are to fix up this cut. It won't do any good to probe for a ball, for there's no ball. It cut clean across, and just deep enough to be interesting. I wonder if you guessed, my dear old chum, that your life was in a mighty ticklish balance for a second there!"

He stooped over the young man as earnestly as though indeed life and death hung in the balance. Allan's eyes were closing fast, though he made a pretense of listening to what his friend was saying. Then Deland straightened up, and turned away to the bell-cord at the other side of the room.

"It's as well to get some whiskey down your throat, my child, as soon as it is possible," he said to himself, giving the rope a good, energetic pull. And when the boy came to the door at his call, he ordered a bottle of that liquor at once, and to send Dr. Manton up to him as soon as possible. Then he returned to his patient and waited, doing what he could.

"It's a deuced bad business, anyhow," he said, as he bent over the bed. "I wish he were able to

tell me just how it happened, but I can get that from Miss Hallston by and by, perhaps. And it's rather queer, it seems to me, that Montgomery doesn't show up. The two coming together after this fashion makes a coincidence that doesn't at all please me."

The boy was back with the whiskey and the message that the doctor would come up in ten minutes.

"But that won't do," said Deland, quietly, but with an authority the other did not dare disobey. "Go down, Jim, and tell Dr. Mainton that if it were not of the most importance I would wait his time; but if he can—no matter how much it may inconvenience him—to come up directly. I must have him, Jim! D'ye hear? Well, see that you bring him!"

"Ten minutes, indeed!" he muttered, as he took a glass he found on Allan's table, and poured into it a good strong dose of the whiskey. "Ten minutes too late, it is as likely to be as anything, Dr. Mainton! When you come, you'll understand why I was so mighty anxious, maybe. I may not be as full-fledged a physician as you, but I know a hard case when I see it."

He went over to the bed, and lifted Allan's head softly on his arm. Mansfield opened his eyes slowly, scarcely recognizing the hand that was so tender in its touch.

"All right, Mansfield, old boy," said Deland, cheerfully. "You'll feel better directly you get this down your throat! Heigho! here it goes! You won't? But you simply *must*, you know! That's it! I always said you'd make a good subject for a hospital!"

As though he were sorry for having given utterance to this sentiment, Deland laid Allan's head gently back upon the pillow, and went across to the door, which he opened, and looked out along the hall in search of the doctor. He was coming, as he was pretty certain he would, and Deland drew him hurriedly in, closing the door after him.

"You're in a big hurry, Deland!" the newcomer said. "What's the matter in here that you'd not even let me finish my dinner?"

But he knew before he finished speaking that there was good need of his services and loss of dinner.

"By George!" he said, by and by, in a low

tone to his companion, as they turned from the bedside. "But that was a narrow escape, Deland! Just the space of a hair's difference, and that would have been the end of Allan Mansfield."

CHAPTER XII.

TWO WOMEN.

"Then you think it is a dangerous case?" asked Deland, with a grave face. He was fond of Mansfield, and would be deeply grieved at any harm falling upon him.

The eyes of the two men met. Both were physicians, and neither could blind the other to the truth. Then Dr. Manton shrugged his shoulders lightly, as he answered:

"He has a constitution like a gladiator, Deland, but it will take some time to prove whether or not he can come through this. It's a pretty bad case. If I were you—of course, I would not be willing to take the liberty, know-

ing him so slightly as I do—but if I were you, Deland, I would let his people know. It will be as well. He needs careful nursing, and maybe the presence of his own people would help him along. A fellow has such repugnance to letting his mother or sisters know how weak he is!” and the doctor laughed softly as he turned away from the door where Deland stood, his face considerably troubled by this certainty from such authority as the physician before him. For Dr. Manton knew what he was talking about when he gave such an opinion as that.

“There is only his mother to tell,” said Deland, slowly. “I don’t like the business at all, Manton! Where’s Montgomery, and how did Mansfield receive such a wound? He needn’t tell me it was accidental! That’s all bosh! Whoever sent that bullet, did it with the express purpose of ending his career, so far as a bullet could end it! It’s an ugly thing, anyhow!”

“So it is,” the doctor admitted, gravely. “So it is. If I were his brother or near friend, I would look into it as far as possible. But you don’t think”—a new light in his eyes, a hard expression coming around his mouth—“you



“EDITH! YOU POOR, DEAR, LOST CHILD!”—See Page 166.

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don't think that Montgomery's not turning up and this have anything to do with each other?"

His voice was low, as though the thought was too harsh to speak of above a whisper.

"I hardly know what I think," Deland said, in a troubled voice. "Montgomery's a nice fellow, so far as I know, but I really know very little about him. He's a sort of coward, though, that I am sure of. Had all the evidence I want for that, in spite of his saving Miss Hallston that time. I haven't forgotten the day he let those horses run by him without so much as an attempt to stop them!"

"What horses?"

Dr. Manton came nearer the door and leaned against it, looking with interest upon the speaker. Dr. Manton did not particularly like Mr. Montgomery. He had his own reason for the feeling, and had never taken any one into his confidence. But Dr. Manton was shrewd in more ways than in ordering for a patient's disease.

"Haven't you heard the story?" Deland looked in utter surprise from the questioner to the bed in the room where the new patient lay

in a stupor that was not sleep nor insensibility. "I thought every one knew the story, Minton. It was the beginning of my acquaintance with him. Not a particularly good recommendation, but there was something queer about the fellow that attracted me toward him. Couldn't help it, you know. Fascination, we'd maybe have called it in a woman. It was this way. I was out in a cutter with Miss Camden—you know Miss Camden?—just out of Montreal. It was only last winter, and made a stir among our set because the ladies were favorites with us. Mrs. Castlemon and Miss Hallston were the ladies. They were driving in a cutter. Miss Hallston had the lines, and in some way their horses got unmanageable and were running like mad, threatening every minute to upset the cutter.

"Miss Camden and I were considerably behind them when the run began, and I hurried our horse up to his biggest speed to overtake them, so that I would maybe get a chance to offer some assistance. It was hard to tell just what that assistance would or could be with the horses going like mad, and we behind them; but one would be willing to run pretty hard risks to save

those women. Of course, a brave fellow wouldn't stop to think or care who the women in danger were, but with two such beautiful women as they—You know how it is, Mainton!" and Deland broke off, laughing softly.

"It was only the space of a breath, it seemed to me afterward, when the big scene came on! There were the horses whirling down that road like the devil himself, and those women never uttering so much as a ghost of a scream, Miss Hallston holding to the reins like death—as though those pretty hands of hers could stop such a race!—when there came along ahead of them, from a cross-road, a man mounted on a magnificent horse. He saw the runaway, pulled in his animal, made as though he would cross the road and so cut off the runaways—he could have done it, at a little risk—but half a man would have done it—when he looked all at once as though he had turned into stone! Don't ask me what was the matter! Can't tell you if life depended upon it; but there he sat on his horse with a face as hard and as white as the grimest stone ever quarried! I could have killed him for it! I remember I wasn't quite account-

able for what I did say, but Miss Camden gave me a round hauling over afterward because she said I swore like a trooper! He could have saved them without a scratch, and, instead of doing it, he held down his horse and never took his eyes from Mrs. Castlemon's face while they were dashing toward him! Of course, they went by him, and just as they passed him, those horses wheeled aside, rushed off the track, and away went the cutter into flinders! Were they hurt? Being a doctor there is no need of your asking such a question, Minton! Hurt? There was pretty Miss Hallston lying as white as the snow itself, all of a heap under the rails of the fence, and Mrs. Castlemon with almost as bad a gash on her forehead as Mansfield has at this minute. She went into brain-fever, too, and it was pretty ticklish pulling to get her out. Somebody hinted—though no one ever corroborated it—that she raved a good deal about Montgomery while she was out of her head as though she had known him. But as to that, I can't swear. I do know, though, that when they came here this season and knew he was one of the guests,

there wasn't so much as the movement of an eyelid to show that she cared.

“As to Miss Hallston, she broke her arm, and was generally bruised, but she recovered with remarkable quickness, and was back in New York before her friends knew of her intention. She never gave any excuse for their sudden leave, and no one among her friends dared ask her. They're both delightful women, but if they don't choose to open their pretty lips about a subject, you wouldn't have the face to go poking about trying to find out about it. When Miss Hallston saw Montgomery here, she merely laughed and shrugged her shoulders, as though it were a question with her whether she liked it or not. You wouldn't do well to ask her, though. And I don't believe any one was more surprised than she, when he jumped after her in the lake that day when she tipped the boat and went under. Mrs. Castlemon was with her, of course. They are inseparable. She didn't say a word. Only when Miss Hallston was safe, she offered Montgomery her hand, and said, as calmly as a sphinx, that he was very brave. They looked at each other, too. Phew! I was looking at 'em—I had

a sort of insane desire to know what was the rub between them—and I saw the look.”

Doctor Mainton shrugged his shoulders with as much expression in the action as a Frenchman would give. He and Deland were looking into each other's eyes intently.

“I know nothing of the man,” he said, calmly, “excepting what I have seen here. He's good-looking enough, but not such a man as would take a woman's fancy, I should think. But you hint that his disappearance and this accident—”

“I tell you there's no accident about it!” interrupted Deland, rather savagely. “I know pretty much about rifles and revolvers, and all that, and you needn't tell me that any one would be hunting during such a storm as that. Besides, this cut, as you very well know, if you know anything about such matters, is not made by a rifle ball, but a bullet from a revolver. It is a clean cut across his head, and burned as it went! Whoever fired the bullet was not far from him at the time. I can put things together that are as plain as daylight, I tell you, Mainton! Can't you see for yourself how clear it is?”

Dr. Mainton laughed, shortly.

“What have you against Montgomery,” he asked, lightly, “that you should insinuate that because he does not show up it is pretty certain that he is the cause of Mansfield’s wound? That is a serious charge, you know. You should be certain before you assert such a thing.”

“I am not fool enough to tell any one but you, Mainton,” Deland said, impatiently. “I have some common sense left. But I hope Montgomery will turn up pretty soon, that is all; and that Mansfield will get over this as well as Mrs. Castlemon recovered from her adventure with that coward!”

“But, are you certain it was cowardice, Deland?” There was an expression in the doctor’s eyes that the other did not comprehend. “Mayn’t there have been some other reason why he did not *wish* to save Mrs. Castlemon?”

Deland gasped, and eyed him in wonder. Then he reached out and grasped Dr. Mainton by the shoulders in a grip like death.

“Mainton!” he exclaimed, “you’re a keen one! Why the deuce didn’t I think of such a possibility? It’s sure and certain there was no cowardice about him when he went over after

Miss Hallston, and he must have gone with Mansfield to-day without any fear, though he knew as well as we that it wasn't a specially safe thing to do. I believe you've hit the nail on the head, and may help get some solution of this mystery. When I go into the private detective business, I'll take you along as partner!"

"And in the meantime," said Dr. Mainton, quietly, "you want to keep an eye upon Mansfield. Let his friends know, if you think it best."

"Yes, poor fellow!" said Deland, returning to the present with a swift change of manner and voice. "There's one thing I am willing to swear to, and that is that there isn't so much as one cowardly hair in *his* head, Mainton!"

"Not one!" affirmed the doctor, as he bade the other good-night, and went away down the hall, Deland's story filling his mind to the exclusion of other thoughts.

In the meanwhile, Mrs. Castlemon, in Miss Hallston's room at the other end of the hall, was giving that young lady her undivided attention. There was need of her care, for Edith was in a

deplorably hysterical condition after the excitement and shock of the storm.

“It was dreadful, Marie!” she cried, shivering with the chill and nervousness. “You don’t know how dreadful it was! I never thought I was lost until Mr. Montgomery told me. He was with Allan, of course. It seems to me he is always where one would least expect him to be. And now he is lost, and maybe something dreadful has happened to him!”

Mrs. Castlemon laughed easily and rather coldly, but the hand that was smoothing the girl’s beautiful soft hair was full of tenderness and sympathy.

“You need not fear for him, Edith,” she said, calmly. “He is in no danger, believe me. You should think of yourself and your friend rather than of him. He is not worth your sorrow. He will take good care of himself. And you were out in that terrible shower with the lightning flashing around you, and you, poor, pretty child, so fearful of the lightning!”

“But I wasn’t so afraid with Mr. Mansfield,” whispered this poor, pretty child, hiding her head in the cushions of the couch where she was

lying. "I wasn't half afraid, Marie, dearest! He is so big and so brave and so careful of one—"

"Yes," said Marie, laughing, with a most provoking nod of her head and a merry flash of her beautiful eyes. "Oh, yes, Edith, dearest, I know how big and brave and careful he is! And what else, my dearest? That was not all, surely! That would not bring my girl home with such a light in her eyes, and such—"

"Oh, don't!" whispered Edith, in confusion. "You are unkind, Marie! You are more than cruel! I shall tell you what I will, and you shall know no more! You do not tell me all your life and your heart and hopes! Why should I—"

Mrs. Castlemon's face was hidden from Edith. The girl's voice was still alarmingly smothered by the cushions of the couch. Had she seen the deathly pallor that struck the beautiful face above her, she might have guessed that there was more of sadness and pain than pleasure in the hidden part of her life. But she did not see, and Mrs. Castlemon was not one to speak where

words might only bring pain to another. So she smoothed very softly and tenderly the bowed, beautiful head, and laughed with apparent ease at the words.

“There are few women, Edith, dearest,” she said, lightly, “who are more true friends than we—you and I. But why should I tell you there is no Lethe can drown my memory.”

“You poor dear!” Edith dropped the smothering cushions and lifted to the light her flushed face and happy eyes, that were darkening with sympathy. She caught Mrs. Castlemon’s hands from her hair and held them down against her face with grace and sweetness. She leaned her cheek against them as a child might do, and the tenderness of her eyes brought a mist of tears to the black eyes. “I am so selfish and thoughtless, Marie! You are an angel and my truest friend, and I can say such mean things to you! I ought to know what you are without your telling me, you darling!”

Mrs. Castlemon leaned over and kissed the soft cheek nearest her, an inscrutable expression in her eyes. She pressed the girl gently down

among the cushions once more, although she did not for the moment touch the tumbled hair that fell over the cushions to the floor in heavy masses of glossy brown.

“You are always generous to me, Edith,” she said, earnestly. “Were you as generous and kind to Mr. Mansfield as you are to me? You were not kind to him this morning, and I could have found it in my heart to scold you thoroughly for your naughty snubbing? He isn’t a man to be fooled with, Edith. He is too true and frank himself to bear falsehood and deceit—”

“But *I* never told him a falsehood or deceived him!” cried Edith, again starting up in astonishment. “What possible reason have I for doing such a thing, and why should I, and how could I if there were any reason? You talk in riddles, Marie Castlemon! If you do not already know me well enough to be sure that I would be false and deceitful to no one, you can know but little of me, indeed, in spite of your professed friendship!” She was greatly excited, and the color flamed across her cheeks in waves of rose. Her

eyes were shining like stars through the gathering twilight of the room.

“ Edith, dearest, have I ever given you cause to say that hard thing of me? Have I ever said other than that you are the sweetest of sweet women, and as true as the heavens? Have I ever had such a thought in my inmost heart that you were one to deceive a man or a woman who loves you or whom you love? Have I ever even hinted to you that I might, would I follow the course of other women who are embittered by sorrow, cry aloud that the world is cruel and full of lying and deceit and treachery in man and woman? Have I ever said the smallest word to lead you to think that I feel myself chosen from others for the hardest smiting of fate? I tell you, Edith Hallston, in spite of my calmness, I cover a volcano of passion in my heart! If ever I should lose command of my cold pride, or be other than merely gracious to those I meet, I would startle you and frighten you, and, maybe, drive you from me—you, the one being in the world whom I truly love and trust! I am sometimes afraid of myself. Is there not need of my keeping down that old

horrible ghost under the waters of Lethe, even though it will not drown—even though it rises between me and happiness always?”

It was marvelous—the command she had. Edith could not ask of her what this sorrow was, nor from whence it came, but there flashed across her mind, too, as clearly and meaningly as the same thought and picture flashed across the mind of Mr. Deland at, perhaps, the same moment, of that mad race through the cold and icy air, with the ungovernable horses dashing them to possible death, and the immovable rider on the powerful horse sitting just at one side of the road letting them go by unhindered, while the eyes of the rider were fixed in a sort of horror upon the exquisite face of her companion—letting them go to their death because *of* that beautiful, pallid face. Then she reached up, and drew down that beautiful woman's head with its coils of black hair like meshes of silk, and held it against her breast with her two warm arms clasped around her shoulders, as though she could so charm away the pain and sorrow that she could not know.

“My poor, sweet, beautiful Marie,” she mur-

mured, her lips against the beautiful hair as she held her so. "My dear, unselfish dearest! My more than friend! If there is in all the world one person who has other than the thought of your goodness and truth and best of all womanly gifts, may there come to him never one moment of peace or rest or gladness till he has owned to you his harshness and cruelty. May all good women shrink from him as though it were them he were unmanly enough to distrust. May he come to his senses with as much pain and sadness and humiliation, as he has laid upon you—"

"How do you know?" whispered the low voice, and there was a touch of hoarseness in it that the girl had never before heard. "What are you saying, Edith? How can you tell what I have suffered through him—"

Then she, too, broke off in her swift utterance, and they remained in silence for a moment, she, as though to regain her marvelous self-control, Edith as though it were a blow, this that she had divined upon the opening of her own happiness. But neither woman could long remain in this silence. Mrs. Castlemon slowly and tenderly loosened the clasp of the warm arms from

around her, and regained her position in the huge arm-chair beside the couch. Edith sank back among the cushions, as though there were no more light and life and sweetness in the world she had thought a pretty good sort of world not long before. It was awkward for both, and yet neither would have changed it.

“I am rested enough now to dress and go down to the parlor,” Edith said, presently. “I was only excited and nervous, Marie. It would be foolish to remain here as though I were ill. Then, too, I must ask after Mr. Mansfield’s condition. I am afraid that wound is worse than he would tell me. It is a dreadful cut, Marie—directly across his forehead, above his temple but the width of a hair!”

“I know you are anxious for your friend, Edith,” said the calm, low, musical voice of the woman in the shadow where her face could be but faintly seen. “But it will truly be best for you to remain quietly here. You have been through considerable excitement. I will inquire as to Mr. Mansfield’s condition, and whether there is any news of Mr. Montgomery.” How quietly she uttered the words—as though, Edith

said to herself, a sob rising to her throat, as though she had not a bit of sorrow in all her heart.

Miss Hallston leaned among her cushions in the darkness, picturing all manner of delightful and deplorable things, till Mrs. Castlemon returned, one of the waitresses with her bearing a tray and a dinner upon it that would tempt the most averse diner. As Edith was most decidedly hungry, although she had forgotten that fact in the rush of others facts, she welcomed this arrival with dancing eyes.

“Aren’t you sweet, you dear Mrs. Castlemon!” she said, gayly, searching the other’s eyes for forgiveness of her careless words. “You knew my failing for a good appetite and something good to eat. I am simply starved, I believe! And are you not going to dine with me? Oh, yes, you are, or I will not touch one single morsel! There! Bring another dinner, Estelle, that’s a good girl. I could not think of eating alone when Mrs. Castlemon has had nothing. Just a cup of coffee and a small piece of broiled chicken, Estelle.”

“And now, my dear,” Mrs. Castlemon added,

when they were left alone with the cozy dinner between them, "I saw Mr. Deland on the stairs and he told me about Mr. Mansfield. They took him to his room, you know, at once, and he is asleep now, Mr. Deland said. The wound is pretty serious, but with care and quiet he ought reasonably to come out all right in a couple of weeks or so—"

"Two weeks!" Edith dropped her knife in dismay, and looked blankly across to her companion. "He is badly hurt, then, Marie?"

"Did I not tell you it is a serious wound, Edith?" Was she revenging herself upon her for the slight, that her voice should be so cold and quiet? "They have had Dr. Manton up to see him, and he and Mr. Deland have done what they can, and he is as comfortable as he can be under the circumstances. Mr. Deland is a sort of surgeon, you remember. As to Mr. Montgomery"—she coolly buttered a thin bit of toast upon her plate—"Mr. Daily has not yet returned, so there is no news of him. Still, they think, so Mr. Deland said, that there is scarcely need for anxiety in regard to him, as he must have lost his way and fallen behind you, but that the

guide will find him, as he did you, after a little search. They are used to such things up here, you know, my dear, and think really very slightly of them. Will you take some more of this chicken, dear? It is remarkably well cooked. I ordered it done myself, and saw that my order was thoroughly carried out, though Estelle is very willing. She is a pretty girl, is she not? And the guide is a handsome fellow!"

What did Edith care for the waitress, whether she were pretty or plain as the plainest of women? Her thoughts were with Allan and with Mr. Montgomery lost upon the mountain, and with the strange, self-possessed woman opposite her. She nodded "yes" to her remark regarding Estelle, but failed to connect the following remark as to the looks and physique of the guide. She was looking with unconscious keenness at the woman across the tray, sitting so gracefully and easily, daintily eating her dinner, her face quite as beautiful as ever.

Could it be possible, she was asking herself, still looking at Mrs. Castlemon, that she was the passionate creature of but a few minutes before, with the quiver in her voice and the pain in her

eyes and the mad throbbing of her heart against her arm as she held her down with her lips against her hair. Could she, under such circumstances, keep down her heart and her sorrow as this woman was doing? Could she laugh and chat and speak unconcernedly of the man who had been so strangely affected by the sight of her, and who had undoubtedly left them to be dashed to death because of her and something affecting their two lives? Edith sighed and turned away her gaze. She could not comprehend the wonderful power of this woman, but she felt its influence as others felt it.

There was music in the parlor below, and it drifted to them through the stillness of the outside world that had followed the fury of the storm. They were sitting very quietly, with little or no conversation, each deep in her own thoughts, when above the music and the soft sound of voices came the startling report of a rifle—another and another—from the direction of the lake.

Both women sprang to their feet in undefinable fear.

“Something has happened to Mr. Mont-

gomery!" cried Edith, as she crossed to her friend, and reached out her hands as though to comfort her.

But Mrs. Castlemon stood cold and motionless, listening for what would follow.

CHAPTER XIII.

FROM LIPS IN DELIRIUM.

The music and singing went on down in the parlor; none but those two women apparently heard the shots. There were no hurrying footsteps, no exclamations, as they seemed to expect. For some time they stood gazing upon one another without speaking. Then Edith said, under her breath:

"They couldn't have heard it, Marie! No one has gone to learn the cause; no one is doing anything! We must let them know, so that they can help whoever wants help, for it must have been some one who is in danger."

“Perhaps, after all, there is nothing more than the signal of the guide’s return. Do not excite yourself, Edith, dear,” said Mrs. Castlemon, calmly. But her face was white, and there was a strained expression around her lips. “We heard nothing after the shots, and if there were danger, surely some one would have shouted. It is always best to give the doubt when one doesn’t know.”

“But suppose Mr. Montgomery has been hurt, and there is need of assistance to get him home, Marie!” added the girl, with excited eyes. “You are so quiet and so cool, but I cannot bear to feel that there may be harm done, and no one to help—”

“If it will relieve you in any way, I will go to Mr. Deland and tell him what we heard,” Mrs. Castlemon replied, calmly. “He will know what is best to be done. Of course, we would not neglect our duty. Stay here, dearest, and I will return as soon as I have found him, and told him this.”

“You are always so very good!” murmured Edith, as she watched the other leave the room. Then she went to the window, and drew aside

the curtain, shielding her eyes against the inner light with her hands, and staring into the darkness. But she could see and hear nothing out there. Darkness was profound, save far away toward the east where a faint glimmer of lightning showed the course of the storm. In these flashes, a dim outline of the opposite mountain could be discerned, but the lake was indistinguishable in the great darkness on this side of the mountain. Against the blackness outside, the light through the parted curtains streamed blindingly, and Edith stood against this in her loose wrapper and fallen hair like a beautiful vision.

Mrs. Castlemon, as she left Edith's room, did not go down to the parlor. She was pretty certain she would not find Mr. Deland there, but with his friend at the other end of the hall. So she went in that direction, and tapping lightly upon the door, was not surprised when her tap was answered by Mr. Deland himself, who came out and closed the door, astonished to see her there, but giving no sign of this to her.

“Is there anything I can do for you, Mrs. Castlemon? Is Miss Hallston worse—”

She shook her head, her finger upon her lip. She was still pale, but she smiled up at him quite calmly as she told her errand.

"It may be nothing, of course," she added, in conclusion, "but it made Miss Hallston uncomfortable to think it might be because of some harm to Mr. Montgomery."

He nodded, smiling to encourage her. Her words were startling, but he would not let his fear cause her discomfort.

"It is, in all probability, the guide returning," he said, as though it were the merest incident. "I will go down and find out, Mrs. Castlemon. Tell Miss Hallston she need really have no fear. I will let you know if there is anything more than ordinary the matter. It isn't likely, though," he hastened to add, as he walked beside her along the hall. "This thing often occurs here, you know, and there is seldom more than slight discomfort comes of it."

"Still, it isn't pleasant to think one's friends are in possible danger, Mr. Deland," said Mrs. Castlemon, softly, but without a quiver in her voice.

"Montgomery is a fine fellow!" Mr. Deland

said, kindly, a sharp look in his eyes as he watched the emotionless face beside him, wondering if this were but the cloak of her pride or honest unconcern. "Besides, we owe him gratitude, you know, for having saved Miss Hallston's life. If not on his own account, we must save him because of that!" He laughed easily, as though he were amused, and paused for a moment at Miss Hallston's door, where Mrs. Castlemon turned from him. "It is more pleasant to pay off such debts, you know, so far as one can!"

"Yes," she said, and her voice was suddenly cold. "An act of bravery should never be forgotten, Mr. Deland; nor an act of cowardice!"

Deland walked on down the hall to the staircase, well aware that Mrs. Castlemon's last words were a thrust at Montgomery's affair in Montreal.

"She's very beautiful and wonderfully jolly to talk to," he said to himself; "but a fellow 'd have a pretty tough time trying to understand her! She's got as many moods as a Turk! There's a fine warm spot in her heart somewhere, though. She's a friend to hold to!"

"Hello!" exclaimed Jackson, who caught sight of him as he was passing through the office,

collaring him instantly. "Hello, I say, Deland; what's the row? Been invisible as a craw-fish since you went off with Mansfield. Got a patient on your hands? He looked pretty well demolished, didn't he? And that was Miss Hallston came up with him? Deuced pretty girl! Come along to my room, will you, and give us a glimpse of you! We won't lose you again in a hurry, old fellow!"

Mr. Deland shook his head, laughing. He was too well acquainted with the warm heart under this gay exterior to mince his words.

"I can't, Jackson," he said, decidedly. "If you'll come with me, and keep a quiet tongue, I'll put you in the way of a sensation! That'll please you, eh? I thought I knew my game!" And still laughing, arm in arm, they went out upon the piazza.

The lights from the parlor windows glimmered through the darkness upon the lawn, making fantastic figures over the drenched grass; but beyond the line of light all was as dark as the grave. Music and scraps of conversation and soft laughter drifted out with the flickering light, as the two stood on the steps looking off

toward the lake and the mountain that shielded any mystery it might hold.

“Phew! You don’t say!” murmured Jackson, when Deland had finished his story, told in few but graphic words. “Montgomery lost over there, eh? They told us some cock-and-bull story, that we believed as much as we would believe in ghosts. And Mansfield’s as low as that, and you have your opinion about the accidental shot, and these mysterious shots the women heard! By George, but it is a queer move! I doubt, though, if we find out anything about these last reports. If it was Daily who fired the shots, where did he get his rifle? I saw him go off, and he hadn’t such a thing as a rifle with him. Montgomery hadn’t, either, you know. And then, if it was Daily, he should have gotten in by this time. If you say so, we’ll investigate without giving an alarm. There’s such a mighty wind made out of a whisper when there’s nothing else to do! They evidently heard nothing out of the way in there. Let’s go to the kitchen and get a lantern or so, and go by ourselves. We can keep quiet about a thing if we

choose, and the fewer the safer, you know. Mansfield's all right to leave, eh?"

"He was asleep when I came out, and likely to sleep for some time, poor fellow!" answered Deland, gravely. "I think your plan a good one, Jackson. The less excitement the better. Miss Hallston is worked up enough about it, and a big time and big talk won't relieve her."

"She isn't specially interested in Montgomery, is she?" asked Jackson. "I had my opinion of some other fellow being the lucky one, from things I've heard. Montgomery isn't the fellow to suit her, I should think. He's not bad as to looks, and has a pretty big pile of the needful, you know, but he isn't just Miss Hallston's style, it seems to me. Of course, it's none of my business either way," added the good-natured, loquacious fellow, "but one gets a notion, as the Yankees say, and it sticks!"

"Montgomery's rich enough, if that's all you want," said Deland, shortly, as they entered the kitchen.

Daily had not returned, but they did not expect otherwise, and were not disappointed. They got the lanterns, with some trifling excuse,

and went out again by the rear way, down around to the front, and across the lawn to the road, stumbling now and then over the rough ground, with only the dim light of the lanterns. They did not talk much going down the road toward the carry. Some indefinable sense of mystery set the seal of silence upon their lips. Many strange things occurred among the mountains; each of the men had been through experiences that would thrill a listener if repeated around a winter fire with ghostly shadows on the wall, but this was different.

It was some little distance to the carry, and although they walked as fast as was possible in the darkness and over the rough road, yet it was some few minutes ere they reached it. Nothing was stirring. Everything was quiet save the low lapping of the water as the wind stole along the surface, and the cry of a night-bird somewhere away up on the mountain. The men stood and listened, swinging their lanterns, now above their heads that the light might strike further over the carry, now lowering it and looking along the ground for any trace of footsteps. Nothing out of the way seemed to have

touched the quiet darkness or disturbed the low murmur of the water and the watch of the bird among the trees.

“Hello!” exclaimed Deland, suddenly, lowering his lantern and starting forward in considerable excitement. “What’s this, Jackson? There’s been a struggle or something here. Look at the footsteps thick in the mud—and the mark of a fallen body—and, by the lord Harry, here are traces of blood! What has happened, Jackson?”

His friend was as excited as himself. He swung his lantern to and fro, stooping the better to examine the marks upon the soft ground. There was no doubt that a struggle of some sort had taken place there. Footsteps that had mingled and been trodden over, making it almost impossible to distinguish one from another, were over a good bit of ground. Some dark stain, too, that Deland recognized at once as blood, trailed for a short distance beyond the spot toward the road.

The men stood for a moment looking into each other’s eyes, trying to read there some solution of the tragedy.

“What do you suppose it is, Deland?” asked Jackson, after a pause, in an undertone, as though afraid even the night might hear of the great evil committed in its shadow. “It’s terribly suggestive, and yet there is nothing definite to go upon. It may be Montgomery—poor old fellow!—and it may be no more than the struggle with some beast or other.”

“That is out of probability,” returned Deland, steadily. “If it had been any animal, there would have been tracks of such. There is nothing here but the marks of men. It is some horrible thing, I am afraid, Jackson! I don’t know why I should think so, either, but there has been so much of the mysterious lately—”

“There’ll be blue lights burning around your head presently, Joe! Come, what shall I tell the ladies, pray, when we get back, and they ask for the solving of their wonderful shots? You can see for yourself, there is nothing here but a lot of foot-prints that any one might have made, and a streak or so of blood, that is more than half likely to be the blood of a deer.”

“Nevertheless, I don’t like the looks of it, George,” said Deland, gravely, though he

allowed his friend to lead him back toward the hotel, his arm linked in his. "And I shall be uncommonly glad to see Montgomery turn up all right and satisfactorily."

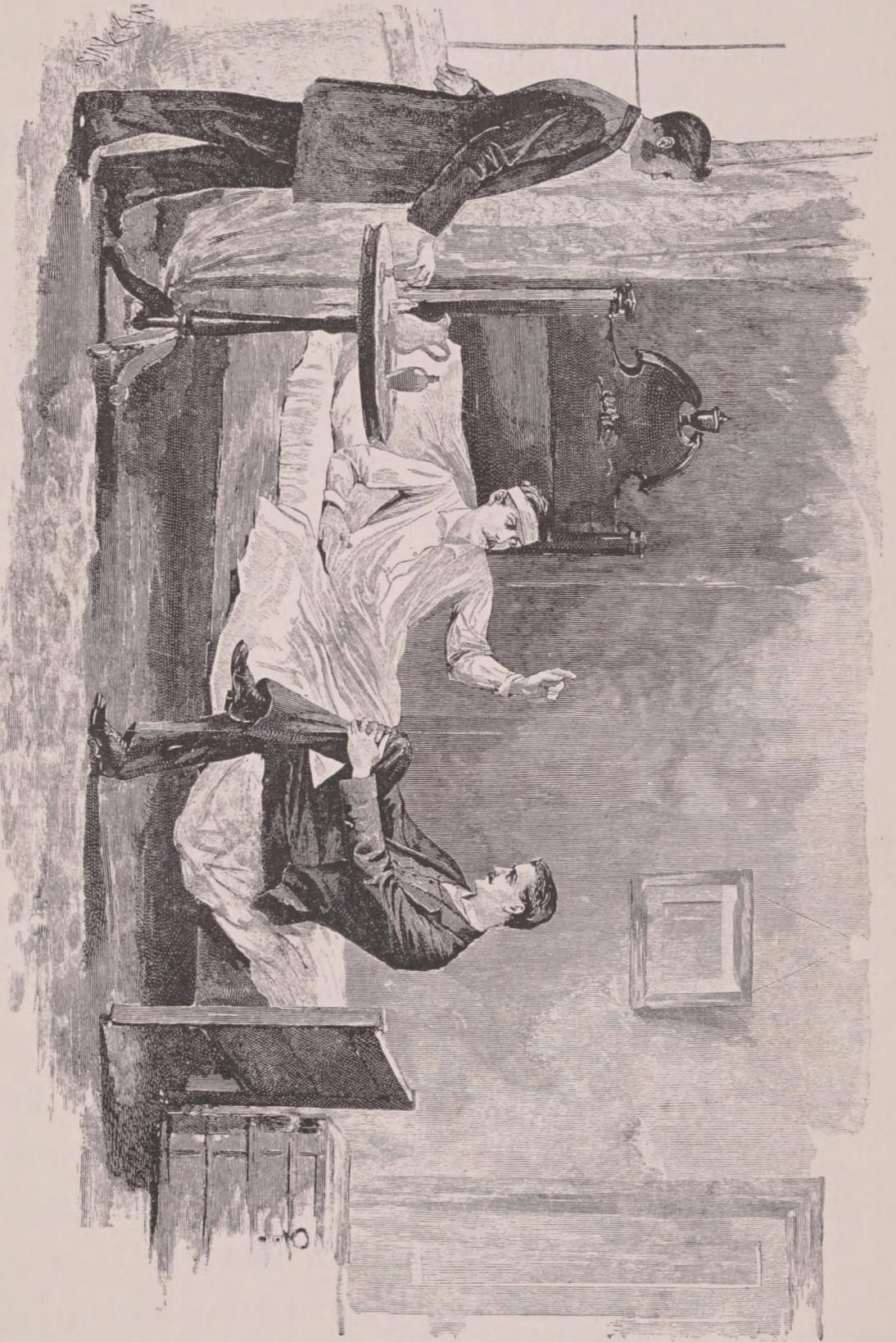
"As he'll do to-morrow at breakfast, of course," said Jackson, calmly. "There isn't anything for us to do but get back and hush up any excitement the ladies may be undergoing. Besides, there's Mansfield may be needing your attention."

"Well," they were back at the rear entrance again, and paused a moment on the doorstep, "you settle about these things, Jackson, and I'll go up to Allan, stopping at Miss Hallston's door, to tell them what we have discovered—"

"What we haven't discovered, you mean," said Jackson, with his hearty laugh.

At Miss Hallston's door Deland paused and rapped. There was a slight pause, and then Mrs. Castlemon herself opened it to him. He was quite himself by that time, and told her quietly there was nothing to fear from the shots they had heard.

"It was probably some hunting-party firing their salute to their hotel," he said, easily. "It



“DO YOU KNOW THAT I BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE GOT MONTGOMERY!”—See Page 218.

is too bad you and Miss Hallston have been alarmed by it. There is really nothing to fear. As to Mr. Montgomery, it is probable that he will be at breakfast in the morning as lively as ever. I trust Miss Hallston has recovered."

"You are very kind to have taken this trouble for us," said Mrs. Castlemon, in her sweet, low, even voice. "I am glad you found nothing alarming. One is liable to misconstrue such sounds at a time like this. We shall be glad, indeed, to see Mr. Montgomery in his old place to-morrow. Miss Hallston agrees with me in this wish, too. Yes, thank you, Mr. Deland, she is much better—quite herself, indeed; but we think a little rest will be good for her."

"I am glad to hear it," he said, gravely. "She, too, will be at her old place at table to-morrow, I hope."

"I only hope your patient will have recovered much of his strength after the night's rest," added Mrs. Castlemon, with her swift thought for others.

They bade each other good-night.

Deland returned to Allan's room. He had made up his mind to stay with him through the

night ; making up a hasty bed upon the floor with the help of one of the chambermaids, he did not fully undress, knowing that at any moment he might be needed at the bedside. He turned the light low down, but left a faint glimmer in the room, though shaded from Allan's eyes. Then telling the chambermaid to send the boy Jim to him, he made himself as comfortable as circumstances would permit.

When the boy came up, Deland held a whispered conversation with him as to his being ready at any minute he might be needed during the night, with the promise of what looked to the boy a pretty generous reward for any such bit of night-work, and then locking the door, threw himself on the bed, to get what sleep he could. But sleep would not easily come to him after the strange events so crowded upon him. Through the dim light his eyes would turn to the bed where his friend lay in that stupor that was not a healthy sleep, and thoughts would come to him of this and that and the other—that mad race of the runaway horses ; the cowardly man who had not moved to render assistance ; the beautiful woman, with her ease of manner

and sweet graciousness, mingling confusedly with the other and this last day's occurrence.

“It's a deucedly queer thing, the whole lot of it!” he said to himself, turning on his pillow, and steadily trying to keep his eyes away from the other bed, and keep them closed. “And, in spite of Jackson, I think it mighty strange why those tracks should have been there. Of course, there is the possibility of its being as he argued; but he's easy-going anyway, and would solve it in some way to get it off his mind.”

Still, he could not sleep, and he could not keep his thoughts from that subject, nor solve the opening mystery that had so strangely drawn him in its hold. The light would glimmer in such a maddening way over the wall, and flicker faintly across the carpet, reaching out in long, thin, ghostly shapes toward the bed and the face of the sleeper. It seemed to him he had lived a lifetime ere morning came. But he had lived but twelve short hours at best, and there was little change in Allan's condition. He lay very still and white upon the pillows, and did not rouse.

Mrs. Castlemon looked very grave when Deland told her of his condition, as they stood for a moment in the hall after breakfast. Perhaps she knew—certainly she had passed through the same fever herself—just what it was that Allan had to fight.

“And he takes no nourishment?” she said, slowly. “That is bad, isn’t it, Mr. Deland? He ought to keep up as much strength as he can to fight the worst, if the worst comes.”

“The delirium, you mean?” he asked, as gravely as she had spoken. He knew that he could not deceive her, no matter how easily they could smooth over the matter with Miss Hallston. “I trust he will come out of this without such danger, Mrs. Castlemon. As to nourishment, I had him take a good dose of whiskey last night. That puts fire into the blood, you know. He was pretty well exhausted, too, and I think he had little rest the night before, though he told me nothing about that. But if he had, and with the exertion of that hurried scramble up the mountain, the thorough drenching he got, and this wound, all together will give him a solid tussle for it.

But we will do our best. I have had a dispatch sent to his mother. Dr. Mainton advised it last night."

She looked up at him swiftly. There was, indeed, no deceiving those brilliant eyes that looked down to your soul.

"He is low, then, Mr. Deland? It is worse than I feared! Is there nothing I can do? I am a good nurse, if you would try me. I could, perhaps, be of some service till his mother does come. A woman, you know, somehow understands better what a sick person would like."

She smiled as she spoke, but she was very much in earnest, and, although he smiled back at her—she was so sweet and beautiful and womanly!—he was as much in earnest as she.

"If there is anything you can do, I shall be very glad of your help, Mrs. Castlemon," he said, gravely. "It is good to feel that the poor fellow has such a generous friend ready to go to him at any moment: It is almost enough to make one envy him."

"No." She drew back from him, and the

smile died on her lips. "Never wish misfortune to come upon you, Mr. Deland, no matter how gracious the compliment you would convey. Sadness and trouble come soon enough, without our wishing them to hasten." Then she shrugged her pretty shoulders, as though to shake off the too deep earnestness of her words, as she added: "Your promise has not been verified, Mr. Deland. As you see, Mr. Montgomery has *not* appeared at breakfast."

"But he will come," Deland said, cheerily, as he passed up the stairs, turning to answer her; and looking down upon her so, she was bewitchingly beautiful. "He will come before the day is over, Mrs. Castlemon. You need have no fear."

"One must wish for the safe return of one's friends," she said, lightly, as she turned away toward the door leading upon the piazza. "Mr. Montgomery has friends here, you remember, Mr. Deland, who must wish for his return."

"And she's still one of the strangest women," muttered Mr. Deland, as he went on up the stairs to his friend's room. "And Montgomery's disappearance is one of the queerest things I ever

knew. Daily hasn't come back yet, but he'll be here before long, and we'll know the worst."

Still, he was dissatisfied with himself and the world in general, as he opened the door of Allan's room and entered.

Hastily glancing toward the bed to ascertain if there was any change, he was somewhat startled to find Allan's eyes open upon him, but without a trace of recognition in them. Crossing to the bedside, he leaned over him with as cheery a face as he could muster, asking, gayly, but in a low tone :

"How are you, Allan, old fellow? Heigho, but you gave us a pretty scare! Been sleeping like a top, haven't you? And hungry, too, I suppose—"

He broke off further words, for there was not the slightest intelligence on the white face or in the open, feverishly bright eyes. Pouring a few drops of liquor into a wine-glass, he leaned over and lifted Allan's head from the pillow, resting it upon his arm as he held the glass to his lips.

"Drink it, that's a good fellow," he said, coaxingly. "Drink it for me, Allan! Now you're

all right! Just lie still and you'll be better presently."

Still the bright, unrecognizing eyes turned from him to wander about the room as though in search of some one. Deland crossed to the bell-cord and pulled it. When Jim answered the ring, he ordered him to send up Dr. Mainton.

"It's as well to have him just now," he said to himself. "The poor fellow needs something to strengthen him and keep him out of this state. I wouldn't care to take the responsibility of giving him a dose of any sort of medicine, though I can do pretty well with an ordinary case. Mainton's close-mouthed, too, so that if there's anything said it'll go no further." For Deland understood that there was danger of Allan Mansfield's falling into delirium from the present looks of things. "And delirium," he added, knowingly, as he waited for the doctor—"delirium is a thing I have no special fancy for. There are lots of things a fellow might say when he's out of his mind that he would sooner die than utter at any other time!"

His fear was not without foundation, as he discovered before long. Dr. Mainton had been

with him but a short time, and they were considering the patient's condition, when he startled them by addressing them, though with a faint half-consciousness that betrayed how weak he was.

“That's you, Deland?” How weak the voice was! Not the clear, hearty voice of Allan Mansfield, that his friends liked to hear! “What's the matter with me? Why am I here and you and—” he seemed to lose trace of his thoughts, and his eyes wandered from the one to the other, recognizing neither. “Oh!” he started up, as though with sudden recollection, his eyes brilliant with swift life, though his voice fell to a whisper of awe and dread. “You found me in spite of them, did you? I felt that you would! It's a deuced bad place to get caught in; but who'd have thought of such a den among these mountains? Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! Only I couldn't help fearing that you wouldn't find me in time! And if Edith should know— They're villainous-spoken pirates, aren't they, those two? But the woman—I've seen that woman somewhere, Deland! And they didn't murder me—and you found me out—and—and—I can't

remember. But do you know"—he leaned forward, startling his listeners more than mere delirium would startle them—"do you know—that I believe—*they have got Montgomery!*"

He sank back among the pillows, staring vacantly at the ceiling, and at them, and at the room, panting as though he had been through some great struggle or some terrible excitement. And Deland and Dr. Manton stood speechless, looking into each other's eyes, wondering how much of truth there might be in these words.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONVALESCENT.

Those few words in regard to Montgomery were the last coherent words Allan Mansfield uttered for many days; there were broken sentences and snatches of words that bore little significance save as the two men who had undertaken the care of him put them with what they caught at first, and which, so placed, were some-

what startling in effect; but the eyes were flamed with fever, and the voice too weak to carry thought beyond the lips.

Mrs. Mansfield arrived the third day after this illness, when Allan was too low to know or care who was beside him; and she gave him the faithful attention only a mother can give.

She was a proud, self-repressed but gracious woman, and it was not many days ere every one at the hotel was interested in and attentive to her. They were friends of Allan, she told herself, and therefore their attentions were most grateful. She was so proud of her son. He had always had a good word for all, and in return every one had a kind word for him, and was deeply concerned now he was ill.

“It is almost like being a queen,” she said to Edith one day, smiling up at the beautiful girl who leaned behind her chair. And she reached up to take one of her warm, little hands in hers, with a look of love on her face that made the girl very happy. “Here I sit, my dear, and his friends come to me with their good words for him, and for me, his mother; and you do not know how delightful it is. Perhaps I care too

much for him, Edith, but he is worthy of a mother's pride."

"Or of any one's pride," said the girl, softly, a beautiful color upon her face. "He was so thoughtful for every one, you see, dear Mrs. Mansfield, that, now he is ill, every one is thoughtful of him."

"Doctor Mainton and Mr. Deland are devoted to him," said the elder lady by and by, her eyes looking far away to the mountain beyond the quiet lake. "I think he could not have had better care at home, Edith, dear. Tell me again about what happened that dreadful day, if you will, my dear. I cannot hear it too often."

So the girl sat down beside her, and repeated once again the story of the pretty luncheon under the pines; her own reckless determination to venture up the mountain alone; the appearance of Allan and Mr. Montgomery; and the manner of his saving her life as she sat under the tree with the ferns and the flowers in her lap. She described with wonderful vividness the sudden descent of the shower, the darkness over the hills, the disappearance of Mr. Montgomery and their final arrival at home—Allan too weak to

get to his room without assistance after the fearful wound in his head. To all of which the mother would listen with rapt attention, her pale, proud face showing her pride in her son, while the face of the girl would lighten and deepen in color, or grow sad with the different memories awakened of that fearful day upon the mountain. Only one thing she did not repeat, and that was the words of love that had passed between them. Those, she told herself, with a sweet flitting of warmer color over her face, were for her alone.

The days passing brought little if any strength to the patient and no news whatever of the man who so strangely went out of their lives. As to the startling words that Allan uttered that first day of his delirium, his friends kept them to themselves, arguing with each other the possible truth that lay beyond feverish fancy.

“Who is she?” Allan would mutter, his bright eyes upon one or other of his friends. “A tawny mustache,” he would whisper, vaguely. “Deuce take the mask—and Edith mustn’t know—she would think—for twelve months—Where’s Montgomery?”

He invariably finished any connected sentence

with this query as to Montgomery, who seemed to be upon his mind continually, and to be a source of fear and trouble. He would turn his head restlessly to and fro upon the pillow, with indistinct words upon his lips, and only Montgomery's name mingled with these mutterings. Dr. Manton and Mr. Deland would soothe him as best they could at such times, and when he grew more violent, and struggled with them to leave the bed and go in search of Montgomery, whispering, with a fearful mystery in his voice, that he knew where he was, and could find him in spite of his oath—he would go to him in spite of his oath—they would hold him down and quiet him as no others could have done. But it left a strange depression upon these two friends. Mrs. Mansfield was never allowed to be with them during Allan's violent ravings, and she knew so little about the mystery surrounding the wound and the disappearance, that she could find no solution to the strange words her son muttered to himself or to his physicians.

“This is growing pretty rough,” Deland said one day, as he and the doctor sat in the latter's room, smoking, after dinner. “I wish the poor

fellow would make haste out of this fever. It isn't pleasant to feel that he is continually telling us things he would never repeat but for the fever. There is some mystery in this affair that is none of our business, and I, for one, would rather know nothing about it. There is something strange about his ride over here from the lake. He won't whisper a word about that, and looked considerably uncomfortable, I remember, that first morning when we were speaking of the trip over. Miss Hallston evidently didn't just see the sense of his shyness about speaking of it, and went off in something of a huff. Of course, they made it up later on, but it is strange, say what you will, Minton. I don't like mysteries myself, and had far rather be out of this one. It's deuced queer where Montgomery is and where under the sun Allan got this wound from! I don't like the looks of it, and I may as well relieve my mind to you, old fellow. You know as much as I, and there isn't any harm in speaking of it to you. I think I would surely burst if I couldn't relieve myself to some one!"

"I should think you might well relieve your mind of its doubts. It'll make you feel better to

have it out with some one. I'm adamantine, you know, and do not in the least mind your firing any number of adjectives at me. It is queer about Montgomery, and the way this wound was given to Mansfield, but as to Allan's words in delirium, you know as well as I that one can place not the least reliance upon such. Besides, what may sound very mysterious to us, knowing so little, may be nothing but the simplest thing when fully laid in the light. Of course, I cannot undertake to explain why he did not desire to go into details regarding his trip over here, but so far as I can see—you will pardon me, Deland—I do not consider that any of our business. He can settle such affairs himself."

Deland smoked on in silence for some moments, his gaze so far off that his companion would not undertake to disturb him. Then he leaned forward to knock the ashes from his cigar with most elaborate care as he said, slowly :

"Mansfield isn't the fellow to do any dishonest or dishonorable act, Mainton. If he chooses to keep any secret, it is his own, I am sure. I have no desire to pry into his affairs.

You need not fret about my doing such a thing. But I do connect this wound and Mansfield's excitement and Montgomery's disappearance! It is borne in upon me, you know! It's a mighty queer thing, taken at best, and why should Allan rave about him as he has and does, if he were not vividly stamped on his mind as one of the last impressions? I know, of course, that there is little reliance to be placed in the ravings of a delirious man, but in this case it seems quite clear to me. If I do either an injustice, I shall most humbly apologize; but I don't believe I do."

Dr. Manton nodded. He blew a cloud of smoke around his head, and then suddenly waved it aside, leaning forward to speak in more earnestness than Mr. Deland had expected of him on the subject:

"I tell you what, Deland," he said; "Mansfield's a good fellow. You agree with me there?"

"Of course." Mr. Deland was considerably surprised.

"He's as open and honorable and true as the day?"

“Yes,” most emphatically, from the other.

“And he’s worthy any woman’s regard and any man’s trust?”

Deland removed his cigar from his lips, and leaned forward over the arm of his chair, his eyes steadily upon his friend.

“What the deuce are you driving at, Mainton?” he demanded, in amazement. “Are you studying up for a jury? Or are you trying to get ahead of me with my opinions, and so charge down upon me at some unfortunate moment for my discomfiture? I can’t make out what you *are* driving at, and I’ve never been considered more than ordinarily stupid. I say it in all humility.”

Doctor Mainton laughed again, but not so easily. He emphasized the words he uttered now with the forefinger of one hand, and tapped Deland’s arm-chair at each word, as though to impress upon him the magnitude of his words.

“Look here, Joe,” he said; “did you ever realize what it is to be accused of any deed that must blast your manhood and honor and take away the best there is in life? Do you know

that that is what you are doing to Montgomery, and at the time when he is not here to contradict you or defend himself—”

“But I’m only saying it to you,” burst in the other, indignantly. “I don’t expect you to blab it to the world! You are as much concerned in this affair as I am. I didn’t ask Mansfield to get hurt, and then fly into delirium and tell his secrets! If he does, and if things look pretty black for the man who so mysteriously disappears while in company with him and just before the shot, why I can’t help it, surely! If it is mysterious, *I* didn’t make it happen! But I can’t help my thoughts, and if you can, you’re more magnanimous and generous than I profess to be.”

“You said the other night that you were attracted to Montgomery in some way, in spite of his cowardly act out there in Canada. You say you have never had any other occasion to call him cowardly. It is sure he was nothing of the sort on the lake nor in the search for Miss Hallston. Because he has disappeared in this strange manner doesn’t argue that he disappeared of his own free will—”

“But I am sure Daily searched as thoroughly as any man could, and found nothing of him save those tracks we found down by the lake and trails of the same from the spot where he first got trace of Mansfield and Miss Hallston. Of course, there are many ways to account for this. He may have fallen into some treacherous hole and died over there, or he may have wandered off into the densest part of the woods, and it have been impossible to find him.” Deland was growing excited. It seemed so very clear to him. “Of course, I have nothing against Montgomery—not a thing in the world, unless it is that stupid affair out in Montreal—and why you should think so, I cannot see. But it is hardly probable that he died over there so mysteriously. I cannot account for my feeling regarding this. I may be wrong, and doing him wrong, but it is so very clear to me. There is some mystery about it, anyway. I’m sure Mansfield’s words prove that.”

Dr. Mainton made no reply to this, and they sat in silence until the lateness of the hour warned them it was time to return to Allan’s room. They made a practice of going together

to his room during the evening after their smoke, and then, when bed-time arrived, one or the other of them remained in the room for the night, and the other went to his own room. It was in this way that they kept up their health, and were so able to take better care of the patient. Mrs. Mansfield was with him a great part of the time during the day, and sat with him while the doctors smoked in the early evening, but they would never allow her to remain there at night; and although she would gladly have done anything one could do, she saw the wisdom in this, and accepted it with her quiet grace and calm self-control, that won the admiration of those about her.

On the evening of this conversation in Dr. Manton's room, Mrs. Mansfield went to Miss Hallston's room, after leaving her son. She was attracted to Edith by her sweetness and beauty and by the shrewd knowledge that the girl was more to Allan than either had said. It was good for her, she said, to be with her and to have the company of such a woman as Mrs. Castlemon during her trouble. It was sweet to have such sympathy as they gave her. It was delightful

to sit with them and hear the old, worn story of Allan's bravery. It was almost as good as to have him with her, she told herself. And to the girl this companionship was very dear.

"He is really no better," she said, as she drew Edith down beside her on the couch where they placed her. "I see very few signs of his recovery, dearest. But his friends are like angels of mercy, indeed. They never leave him without I am with him. But it is so sad to hear him murmuring such strange things as he lies there, knowing no one—not even his mother. They will not let me stay when he gets these fits of delirium, if they know it, but sometimes, when they are away in the early evening, he nearly breaks my heart with his murmurs! There is little that he says that I can understand, but sometimes he starts up and cries out such strange things, and it is all I can do to quiet him or reassure him that there is nothing to so disturb him."

"It must be so hard for you, you poor dear!" whispered Edith, softly, smoothing tenderly the soft hand held in hers. "Is he very violent, Mrs. Mansfield? Is there nothing they can give him

to make him quiet and so keep his strength? It seems to me he can get no strength unless he is kept as quiet as possible."

"Oh, I do not tell them about it," said Mrs. Mansfield, gravely. "I am so afraid if they knew he was at all violent with me they would not leave me, and it is necessary they should have rest, and one can get no good nurse here, and besides," with a mother's fondness, "I love to be with him alone even that short time, dearest!"

"But he is not really violent with you?" asked Mrs. Castlemon, softly, with frank sympathy. "We hope so soon to have Mr. Mansfield himself among us, dear Mrs. Mansfield, that I hope there is nothing serious in these attacks of delirium. Wouldn't it be best to tell the doctors, if they continue, rather than have him weakened? They are such trying things—these delirious attacks, you know."

"He isn't really violent, no," answered Mrs. Mansfield, a sweet, faint flush upon her face at the few words of friendship from the beautiful woman opposite her. "He only cries out such queer things, and murmurs about some woman

whom he declares, over and over, that he knows, and some mysterious things of a night in the woods, and murderers, and Mr. Montgomery's being taken by some one or other. And he always ends," she added, with a tender pressure upon Edith's light hand, "with the injunction—always whispered most earnestly—that Edith must not know! It's nothing but the ravings of fever, of course, but it all sounds so real when I am sitting there alone with him, that it frightens me sometimes. You know of nothing to cause him this uneasiness, either of you?"

An indescribable change fell upon Edith's face. The sweet, warm color died out, leaving her very quiet, but pale; the dark eyes, that had been so full of life and sympathy, grew rather cold in expression, and would not meet the searching eyes of the mother bent upon her. Even the small hand Mrs. Mansfield held so closely in hers grew cold and trembled slightly.

"Of course, I know nothing of such a thing," said Mrs. Castlemon, gravely and sweetly, knowing that the mother would have some reply, and seeing the strange change upon Edith. "It is only certain that Mr. Mansfield can know

nothing of murderers and any one into whose hands Mr. Montgomery could have fallen, any more than he could fret over some woman he cannot place. You need not worry about what is said in delirium, dear Mrs. Mansfield. One is never accountable at such a time. The strangest things come into one's mind—truly, I know, because I have been through the same fever, as Edith knows—and I kept talking, they told me afterward, of the silliest things about people I could not of course know. And I was certain some great calamity was going to fall upon me and some one whom I loved very much, and all that absurd stuff. Truly you need not think twice about what your son says, Mrs. Mansfield. It is only that ravings will weaken him. Rest is what he needs.”

Still that strange coldness remained upon Edith's face, and no word broke the silence of her lips.

“And you would advise me to tell the doctors, dear Mrs. Castlemon? You think it is right for them to know?”

“You know as well, if not better than I, what should be done,” answered Mrs. Castlemon softly,

but there was a shadow in her eyes that the other could not comprehend.

So the evening passed, and Edith someway left the conversation to her companions, sitting very quiet and cold beside Mrs. Mansfield. But by and by the feeling grew in her heart that after all it was but a foolish dream of hers that Allan had told her he loved her! He could not have ever told her that. Did not these two women say he was a man to be proud of? He loved her and then to cry out of some woman whom he knew! She had heard from Mr. Endicott, in a most innocent manner, that some guest arrived that first morning at an unearthly hour, and when she had asked Allan, he had hesitated, and turned the question. She could forgive an unkindness to herself alone, but she would never bear any man's deceit. If he did not wish her to know why he had arrived at such an hour—perhaps she was doing him an injustice, but she doubted that—he should have told her frankly where he had been.

Was it any of her concern whether he remained at the lake over night or rode out at the hour they named? But for him to attempt to deceive

her, to turn her question aside, as though she were nothing to him, as though he had not shown her in every way a man could show a woman that he cared for her, was quite beyond her endurance. She was sorry, very sorry, that he was so ill; and she had forgiven the few words of disagreement they uttered upon that morning, but here had his mother told her of some mystery that must affect her—that Allan declared that “Edith” must not know.

When Mrs. Mansfield rose at last to leave them, she drew Edith in her arms with sudden emotion new to her pride, and touched her sweet, cold face with her lips, as she said, softly, for the girl alone:

“You will be good to him if there is ever need, dearest?”

And with a swift softening of her hard heart, Edith murmured that she would, her eyes suddenly filled with tears of regret for her unkind thoughts already reigning in her heart. And when she was gone, the girl threw herself upon the couch in a passion of tears, burying her head among the cushions in shame for her fleeting self-control.

“My poor, dear, sweet girl!” whispered Mrs. Castlemon’s musical voice, as her gentle hands smoothed the half-buried head among the cushions. “My naughty, hard-hearted girl! As though her Marie could not see with wide eyes what is wrong with the dear, wilful heart!”

“You don’t know!” cried Edith, suffocatedly, burying her head still deeper in the stuffy cushions. “You could not guess one half the meanness of your naughty girl’s heart, Marie! I am very, very unkind and hard and unfeeling! I am so sorry I could for one minute let such thoughts come about the nicest—”

“Oh, yes,” said Marie, in the fond, foolish but comforting way she had with this girl. “We know just how nice and how big and good he is, my dearest girl! We would bury our pretty heads quite out of sight, because we are so ashamed of ourselves! And you deserve to do it, too, you unkind girl!”

“And I couldn’t even hide that from you!” whispered Edith, by and by, when she had grown calm enough to withdraw her head from the cushions, and lay with her beautiful hair disordered and falling upon the pillows,

while Mrs. Castlemon's soft hands touched the bright head tenderly. "There is just nothing you cannot see, Marie! If I had committed murder, you would find it out at once! I wouldn't have the slightest hope with you!"

She lifted up her face from the cushions, very arch and sweet and beautiful, with the traces of tears still upon the long lashes, and then suddenly reached up with a startled cry:

"What is the matter, Marie? You are ill—you are faint. Let me call Dr. Manton or Mr. Deland! Let me do something for you! What is it?"

Mrs. Castlemon pushed her down among the cushions again and said, quite steadily, though the pallor had not left her face nor the fear died out of her eyes:

"It is the heat, perhaps, my dearest Edith. I am already better. We have had considerable excitement, too, you know, of late. I am such a quiet body the least excitement undoes me for a long time! I think the most sensible thing for you and for me is to go to bed at once and rest! To-morrow may bring us some good news of Mr. Mansfield—"

“And solve the mystery about Mr. Montgomery, too!” added Edith, with a new tone of voice. She rose from the couch and rang the bell.

“What are you going to do?” asked Mrs. Castlemon, now quite herself, though the color did not return to her cheeks.

“I shall order for you what I think best,” was the quiet reply, an altogether new touch in Edith’s manner. “You are ill, Marie, dearest, and I shall take it upon my hands to see that you are taken care of. You may as well be still,” as Mrs. Castlemon would have spoken. “I shall do as I please in this, my dear. I think it time some one looked after you. You are always devoting yourself to others.”

A slow flush stole into the pale cheeks, as Edith ordered a glass of wine and a biscuit from the waitress who answered the bell.

“It is good to be taken care of,” she said, sweetly, “but it is quite unnecessary, Edith!”

Edith only shook her head gravely, and said she knew best that time.

And in the morning when Mrs. Mansfield went to her son’s room to inquire as to his con-

dition, Mr. Deland told her with his face lighted by pleasure that Allan was starting off in a good way toward recovery.

“He slept well and naturally, for the first time, last night,” he said. “And he woke up quite himself, although of course very weak. You shall see him presently, Mrs. Mansfield.”

But when Mrs. Mansfield was at last shown into the room, and Allan was smiling up into her face, his hands held in hers, he turned to Deland and asked, with a sudden thoughtfulness chasing the smile away :

“I have had a sort of consciousness all along that there had something happened to Montgomery, Deland! Has he turned up yet?”

“He’ll turn up all right, by and by, old fellow,” Deland said, with an encouraging smile. “You needn’t bother about him.”

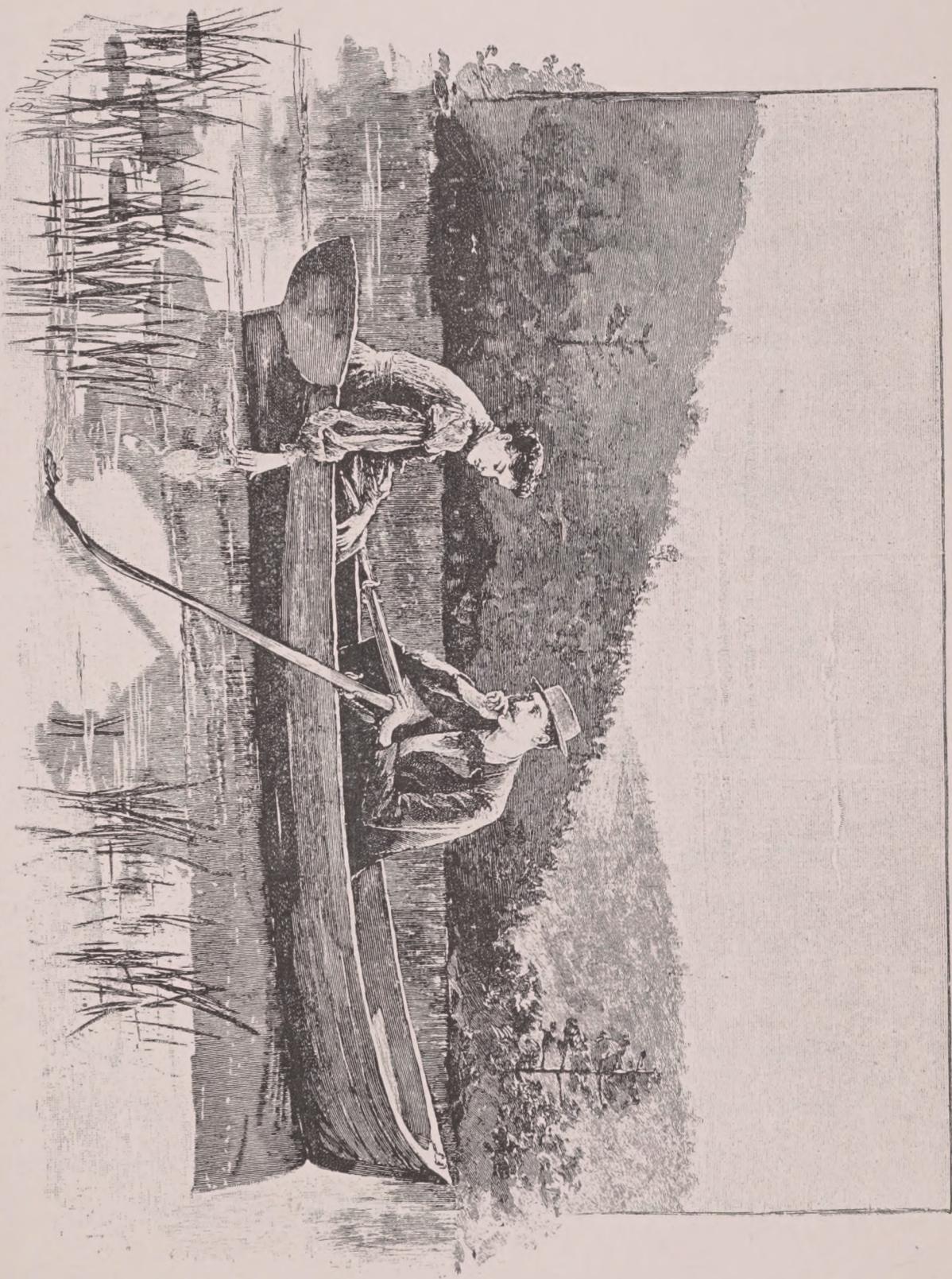
But Allan’s face grew rigid with some hidden fear, and his voice was scarcely audible as he whispered, hoarsely :

“Merciful powers! They have got him then!”

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE LAKE.

Edith and Mr. Mansfield were rowing upon the lake. Evening shadows were setting down and out from the mountain, leaving the boat upon the water solitary and almost motionless. There had been other boating-parties on the water during the early evening, but this one boat was then the only one stirring. It was very still, and the air was heavy with the odor of balsam drifting down from the trees above. The west was soft with faintest rose of after-sunset. The world was full of peace and beauty stretching out and around the two in the boat, drifting aimlessly with the lifting and falling of the water along the shore, that set little ripples surging to and fro and widening toward the heart of the lake. Silence falling upon them, Allan had let the oars lie in the row-locks so that they just trailed above the lake, making tiny ripples and marring the reflection, and leaned forward, one elbow on his knee,



“OF WHAT ARE YOU THINKING, EDITH?” HE ASKED.—See Page 241.

watching Edith's eloquent face under its shadow of falling hair. His heart was in his eyes, and she must have read his secret there had she raised her eyes; but she kept them studiously upon the mad little eddies made by her hand in the water and the dancing glimpse these allowed of the bending face.

They drifted beyond the gaze of those upon the hotel piazza, and Allan spoke suddenly, his voice very grave :

“Of what are you thinking, Edith?” he asked, and he reached out to take in his the hand that was trailing along the water. But she laughed wickedly, and drew it back. “You are not angry with me, dearest?” he added, hastily, glancing swiftly up into the bent face. “What have I done to offend you?”

She shrugged her shoulders wilfully, and would not answer, her head bent still lower to hide the mischievous lips that would smile in spite of her silence.

“You know that I go away to-morrow, and it is but kind for you to part friends with me after what you said to me that day—”

She interrupted him with a swift movement of

her hands. She shook the water from the hand she had trailed in the lake, and wiped it carefully upon her handkerchief as though that were her whole object in life. Then she lifted her head, and met his eyes steadily.

“Where are you going, Mr. Mansfield?” she asked, calmly. He had not told her yet, and she would know his errand or they could not part friends indeed, as she felt certain, after the mystery of his delirious ravings. It was but one week since he was able to leave his room and enter the life of the hotel again, and he had regained his strength very slowly. She was tempted to relent when she realized how weak he was, for he grew pale to the lips at her question, and put his hand to his head, as though it were pain to think even of the old trouble. But when he answered her it was very calmly, and he did not attempt to touch her hand again.

“As you know, Miss Hallston,” he said, quietly, “nothing has been heard of Mr. Montgomery since he stood with us upon the mountain that afternoon, three weeks ago; and I shall take it upon myself to go to his home in Canada and learn if there has been heard anything of him

there. If not, I shall follow up what little clew I possess, and not stop till I have either found him or discovered where he is."

She glanced up swiftly from under her lashes, but let her eyes drop immediately upon meeting his steady gaze.

"Then you have some clew?" she asked, aimlessly. She did not know what to say, and this came into her mind the first.

"It cannot be called exactly that," he said, smiling; "it is not even so much as that word implies, but it may lead me to discover his whereabouts, if everything else fails."

"It hasn't anything to do with murderers and strange women and the heart of the woods, I suppose," began Edith, with no other object than to tease her companion. But the consequence of her words was startling.

Allan started, dropping one of the oars in his excitement, his face like death, and a horror in his eyes as he glanced across at the girl. His oath flashed before him in letters as vivid as fire. His hand trembled violently as he leaned over the side of the boat, reaching for the oar. He could scarcely control his agitation.

“What do you mean?” Allan asked, as, with a powerful effort, he regained his self-command and the oar. He raised his hand to his head with that pathetic motion, that brought the swift pity to the eyes of the girl, though she would not yet give up her endeavor to make him tell her what she desired to know in regard to the mystery half revealed by his delirium. “How do you know anything of what happened that night, Edith? Is it possible,” a deepening of the dread on his face, “that I told anything of that during my illness? Will you not tell me, if you have one atom of love or pity in your heart—” He was growing rather incoherent.

Edith lifted her head proudly. What was it to him whether or not her heart was hard or pitiful? Had he ever renewed the subject begun under the black heavens on that afternoon that came so near ending his life? She shrugged her shoulders with great carelessness and raised her eyebrows in mild disdain.

“I’m sure I never professed to own such incumbrances as either love or pity, Mr. Mansfield. And whether I had or not, what is it to you? You are going away to-morrow, and will

soon forget such matters in the new excitement of your old murderers and strange women whom you have known, and the mysterious woods—”

“Forbear!” he cried, in sudden, uncontrollable excitement, reaching out his hand toward her, as though to silence the rash words. “What are you saying, Edith? Do you know—can you not realize what you are doing?” Then once more, with that stern struggle with his weakness, he added, more quietly :

“Edith, my dearest, I have not asked you to renew the sweet promise you made me that afternoon when we were on the mountain. Do you wonder at this? You cannot know my reason for my silence, nor the struggle I have had to keep this silence. But it seemed to me the only honorable course. There is some terrible mystery upon me that I have given my oath shall not be revealed for one year. I have sworn it, Edith, by all my hope of your love, by my love for my mother, by my hope in a hereafter. And if I should break this oath, there shall come upon me not only death, but also the death of her whom I hold the dearest thing in the world. Do you understand, Edith? Do

you know why I can tell you nothing yet? That my only hope for the future is to keep from you or any one the knowledge of what I passed through that endless night of my first arrival? No word of it can pass my lips until the year has gone. Even a hint will bring the terrible revenge. It seems to have made an old man of me, dearest, in these three weeks, more than the fever could have done.

“And I could not, I told myself, ask for your love—this I said when I was calmer, as I grew better—until I could tell you what I passed through that first terrible night. I said that I could not come to you and ask for your love, and keep that secret from you. I must have the most perfect faith in my darling and she in me.”

He paused from sheer weakness, and his white face was very pathetic, appealing to the girl's warm heart. The words of his mother flashed back upon her as she sat for a moment in silence :

“You will be good to him if there is ever need, dearest.”

Had she forgotten that? Had she for one moment forgotten the tender pleading of the

mother's voice? She leaned forward. They were in the shadow of the underbrush growing on the edge of the lake, and with her two small hands she drew down the hands with which he had for a moment covered his agitated face. There were tears in her eyes, and a quiver around the sweet red mouth that must have melted the sternest heart.

“My poor Allan!” she said, softly—ah! very softly indeed, as she met with this face the pallid face of her companion. “Did you truly think Edith Hallston has no heart, no pity? Are you not very, very sorry for so slighting her? Are you not to beg her deepest pardon for such sin? Are you not to say that, even if you cannot tell her this dreadful mystery—as though a woman could not trust the man she loves to that extent! Poor woman indeed she must be, if she cannot! Is that all the faith in the sex you have learned from your mother—”

There was never any conclusion to this very pretty speech. Miss Hallston's hands were taken with considerable energy in the hands she removed from the man's face, and the same man, with remarkable assurance, changed his seat for

one beside her, setting the oars quivering through the water and thick ripples surging out from the boat, as though the lake had suddenly gone crazy with happiness. Miss Hallston's face, having no sofa cushions handy, was forced to hide itself upon Mr. Mansfield's shoulder, and her beautiful hair became dreadfully ruffled, with his lips against it in a most familiar manner.

Nevertheless, Miss Hallston made no objection to this exchange of resting-places, and took it quite coolly, all things considered, as though this were, in truth, the better resting-place of the two; and the boat drifted on with reckless ripples, with the oars trailing aimlessly in the water.

By and by Miss Hallston remembered that it must be time to return to the hotel, as darkness was fast settling over the lake, and her companion, very unwillingly, it must be confessed, resumed his former seat, and took up the oars.

"You will sing for me this last night upon the water, my dearest?" he asked, as he turned the boat's head up the lake. "It may be a long time before I see you again, and I shall remem-

ber your voice in the stillness and with the fragrance of the pines, as though you were somehow with me, even in my absence."

"I am afraid my voice isn't in singing order, Allan," she said, softly, a slight break in the low tones. "But I will do my best for you. I shall remember, maybe, as well as somebody else, that we rowed here in the shadows—"

He came near endangering their lives again as he leaned over to silence the faltering words.

"Give me that old, old—oh, dreadfully old song of 'the moon falling over the fountain and the day beyond the hills. It is always sweet, dearest," said Allan.

And Edith, with a new sense of submission, lifted her really pretty voice in the serenade to Juanita.

They came out in sight of the piazza as she finished the soft old song, and leaning over the side of the boat, she trailed her hand as carelessly in the dark waters of the lake as when they floated away not long before, in a far different mood. There was a light above the mountain as though beyond were some mystic fire to

flame the mist into rose, and Edith, looking up as though her song were, of a truth, her own heart's voice, said, wistfully :

“What a wonderful moonrise, Allan. I wonder if your mystery is as strange as that light yonder!”

He turned his gaze upon the mountain peak invisible in its hood of gauze, and an expression of awe fell upon his face. The eyes of the girl were bright, and as she turned her gaze she saw this look upon his face.

Obedying a sudden impulse, she said, softly :

“That rosy mist is but a fit emblem of the mystery set in the very heart of the mountain, isn't it, Allan? Have you forgotten how near we both came to seeing beyond all mysteries, that day, not long ago? Whenever I think of that hideous serpent, and how soon it would have been too late—”

He hushed the sadness of her voice with the reproachful look from his eyes. It was marvelous the way she obeyed his slightest look, when but one short hour before she had enjoyed nothing more than tormenting him, by utterly ignoring any tie of friendship between them. The

boat ran up among the long grasses of the bank at that moment, and he shipped his oars, rising to catch the anchor line.

“You are never to think of such horrible things, my dearest, any more,” he said, as he helped her from the boat. There were too many eyes upon them for any warmer expression of sentiment, but to her, the tone in which these words were uttered told her more than innumerable caresses could have done.

“And it’s very nice to think you’re not sorry you saved me,” she said, laughing saucily, as they walked up the road to the hotel. “It’s very nice to feel that one belongs to some one who can give orders in such a peremptory manner, Mr. Mansfield.”

Then they both laughed like happy children, and the night wind bore, perhaps, this sweet submission to the rosy mist wrapping the mountain-peak in its folds.

Mrs. Castlemon was one of a group upon the piazza, as the two mounted the steps in the semi-darkness, where the lights from within struggled against that rosy light rising in the east, and the dense gloom falling stealthily over

the lake below. She beckoned them to come to her, and as Mrs. Mansfield was with her, they obeyed.

“Are you not fatigued, after your severe illness, to have rowed so long, Mr. Mansfield?” asked Mrs. Castlemon, in her soft voice, that somehow always soothed one in its peace and tenderness. “We have been fearful of the consequences, your mother and I, in spite of your wonderful progress toward recovery. You should be more careful. We do not wish to lose your friendship or your companionship from any act of carelessness, you know.”

How altogether charming she could be! Why was it that the thought of Mr. Montgomery returned to him keen in looking upon her in her beautiful quietness among the shadows? A great pity rose in his heart, not for the man who was absent, but for this woman, who never betrayed whatever of pain or of sorrow—if such could come near such a woman—had entered her life. Strange, he told himself, how one’s thoughts would wander, and how daring they could be!

“To know that Mrs. Castlemon misses one is enough to make one more careful, indeed!” he

said, smiling, as he seated himself beside her. "Then, too, as I leave in the morning, I would not wish to tempt fate again to lay illness upon me! You are always so kind to others, Mrs. Castlemon! I wonder if you are never moved to our petty sarcasms and spite! It is restful just to be with you." He sighed unconsciously. The thought of Montgomery was heavy upon him.

"I am sorry to know you will leave us so soon after your convalescence, Mr. Mansfield," said Mrs. Castlemon, steadily, but in a lower tone. Her eyes were not looking at him, but away at the flaming mist on the mountain-top. "It is very brave and generous of you to undertake this errand, but do you think it is quite necessary? If Mr. Montgomery is alive and wishes us to know it, would he not take the trouble to let us know? It is scarcely likely that any harm should have fallen upon him so near the house. I fear you will discover that you have been considerably taken in at last."

She laughed in an icy, scornful way utterly new to her, and her companion turned upon her in amazement.

“Do you know anything of him, Mrs. Castlemon?”

Dr. Mainton was coming along the piazza, and overheard the last words. Neither of them saw him, but he paused involuntarily to catch the answer.

“I know him. Mr. Mansfield?” Every trace of her strange emotion had disappeared. “Why, what could I possibly know of him, indeed, Mr. Mansfield? I have seen him here a few days at most. One could not claim as friendship such short acquaintance as that.”

What was there in the woman's life that linked her in any way to Mr. Montgomery? Dr. Mainton was asking himself, as he stood silent a moment. Deland had told him what he knew of their acquaintance, and the hints he had thrown out were strangely full of possibilities. Dr. Mainton himself was too much interested in Mrs. Castlemon to take coolly any possible hindrance in the way of their more than friendship. For Dr. Mainton was daring, too, in his dreams. Then he crossed the few steps between them, and laid his hand on the back of Mrs. Castlemon's chair. An authoritative way it was, and Allan

looked up somewhat surprised, although he was too thoroughly a gentleman to betray such emotion.

“Have you noticed the remarkable appearance of the mist on the mountain?” the doctor asked, calmly, as though he had been standing there for all his life, it might be. “Looking at it through the telescope, it is very singular. Would you like to look at it in that light, Mrs. Castlemon?”

She looked up at him with a winning smile.

“You are very good, doctor. Have you a telescope? The mist is beautiful viewed with the naked eye; how much more so must it be through a glass. Will you bring it here, or did you wish us to go within—”

“I will bring it to you,” he interrupted, not hastily, but as though to convince her that it was herself he would please, not the group upon the piazza. With a woman’s instinct she knew this very well. With a woman’s instinct, too, she knew how to meet it.

“You are so kind, doctor! Edith, my dear, we are to have a treat. You are fond of mysteries, and Dr. Manton has generously offered to let us view that mist yonder through his glass.

Mysteries are so interesting, you know, Mrs. Mansfield !”

Edith clapped her hands softly, her animated face turned toward them in the half-darkness. Mrs. Mansfield, pleased with whatever pleased the girl, echoed her soft applause.

“Dr. Mainton is always generous,” she said, in her sweet old way.

“It is no generosity,” said the doctor. “I am sure it is merely a great pleasure, Mrs. Mansfield. You shall have the glass at once, if you will pardon my absence for one moment.”

“He is such a good fellow!” said Allan, as the doctor disappeared into the hotel.

“Indeed he is!” corroborated Edith, with considerably more enthusiasm than was at all necessary for the mere act of granting this pleasure to the ladies. Then she blushed bewitchingly, and was deeply interested in watching the distant mists, without the aid of a glass.

Allan’s face was eloquent as he glanced over at her, and Mrs. Castlemon smiled quietly as she saw the look.

Mr. Deland came out with the doctor after a moment or so, and the group was very merry,

watching the mystery developing on the mountain-top. Miss Camden, who was with Deland at the time of that fatal runaway in Canada, presently joined them, until their group seemed the centre of interest, and one by one most of the other guests had crowded about them. The doctor's telescope was in demand from one pretty pair of hands to another, and many pairs of bright eyes were leveled at the distant mist, where the moon was setting her colors in exquisite blending. It was so necessary, too, for stronger hands than theirs to set the focus, and gave such a charming opportunity for soft words in delicate ears tipped just the slightest degree, while white hands clasped the instrument!

"It is one of the prettiest things I ever saw!" said Miss Camden, as she passed the glass to another charming young lady.

"It is indeed!" said Mr. Deland, but unfortunately he was looking at her instead of the scene upon the mountain.

"It is more than merely pretty," said Edith, in a low tone, to Allan, who was now beside her, leaning over her chair. "I never saw anything

so full of possibilities in my life; did you, Allan? What couldn't an artist do with such delicate work!"

"Some artists might spoil it—the generality, I think, too—others might get a touch of the beauty, but very few could have the power to faithfully reproduce it!" answered Allan, with his hand just touching her shoulder as it rested upon the chair. "I shall remember it, though—the whole scene—without the aid of any artist, Edith. I wish you could change your plans and run up to Canada, too. I cannot bear to leave you. You do not know what an absurdly superstitious fellow I have grown in the last hour. Couldn't you possibly get Mrs. Castlemon to go?"

Edith laughed, shaking her pretty head, but with more gentleness in her denial than she usually granted such.

"No," she said, gently. "It would not do at all, Allan, my dear! In the first place, every one would know we were going because you—"

"Well," interrupted this new sovereign, calmly. "What if they do, Edith?"

"Why, it wouldn't do at all, as I have just said,

Allan! We took the rooms for the season, and unless something altogether new comes up, we are likely to remain here till September, any way. But," there was a tender relenting in her voice, and he leaned lower to catch the soft words, "if you are not back here by then, we may—remember, I only say, we *may*—run over to Canada before going down home. It would be a charming little trip before taking up the stifling city, and would give us the opportunity of discovering what you have done in the way of finding out about poor Mr. Montgomery."

"If I thought it would take me until then to find him," Allan said, slowly, as though keeping down some great mental struggle, "it seems to me I should go insane. You cannot know what it is I fear, Edith. I am absurd, no doubt, but the feeling holds me, and I cannot shake it off. It is most likely that I will run over Montgomery before I have been out two days, in which case I shall at once pack up and return to the present state of my existence. I presume there will be a welcome for me from somebody not a thousand miles away—"

"I suppose it would not do to refuse when such

a return is still doubtful," answered Edith, with a soft laugh. "What will I do without either you or Mr. Montgomery to bring into some dreadful mishap. I have done nothing to distinguish myself for these three weeks, Allan!"

"Except," the moon had risen above the mountain peak, and the group was dispersing in twos and threes, "except proving that you are a naughty little gossiper, and anxious to discover what you imagined was somebody who had cut you out—"

"Oh, indeed, no!" she was very hasty in replying. "You need not flatter yourself to that extent, Allan Mansfield! Even if you are going away in the strangest chase I ever heard of, and your return is so doubtful, I shall not acknowledge that! I did not think that indeed, indeed, but that there may have come to you some harm—"

"You are not to deny that!" he said, swiftly. "I had as lief let it go at that. I shall be more certain that you love me, Edith."

They were silent for a long time after that. Dr. Manton and Mrs. Castlemon were talking quietly, a little apart from the rest, and Mrs.

Mansfield was talking with one of the older ladies who had been drawn with the others by the beauty of the scene. Miss Camden and Mr. Deland were sitting on the steps in calm unconcern as to the dignity of their seat. She had her guitar, and was striking the strings softly now and then as an accompaniment to their low conversation. Every one seemed thoroughly satisfied with himself or herself. The evening was very still and beautiful.

“It is a pleasant memory to take with me,” said Allan, by and by, as they were parting for the night at the foot of the staircase.

“And I hope your mystery will clear away as perfectly as the mist broke apart before the moon, on the mountain yonder. Can I wish you better, Allan?” Her eyes were wonderfully shy and sweet, lifted to his with the new light upon them.

Her hands were very warm in his, as he smiled an answer upon her. He could carry the memory of this face forever in his heart without ever seeing it again. The thought startled him. Why should he never see it again? And, although it was indeed a sweet memory to go with

him, he should hope soon, and very soon at that, to return again to the original.

“To know that you have such perfect faith in me, without so much as a word of explanation, is very sweet to me, Edith,” he said. “It proves beyond the shadow of a doubt how much you truly love me.”

“They say such mean things about us women being so curious, you see, Allan,” she said, wickedly, but with a sweetness, too, “that you are ready to believe we would spoil the life of our very dearest to gratify that mean characteristic. Of course, it’s nice to have mysteries cleared up, and you are to clear this up for me before long ; but if I should never know really what it is, I am satisfied so long as it brings no harm to you.”

“And never shall it bring harm to the one who is the dearest in the world to me !” he said, vehemently, as he turned away.

She smiled to herself all the way up to her room, and ran in, quite breathless with happiness, to where Mrs. Castlemon was waiting for her.

“You needn’t say one word, my dearest,” said

this incorrigible woman, clasping the girl's outstretched hands. "As though I couldn't see the happiness in your face without a single word! I am very, very glad for you, Edith! If there is a man in the world worthy of you, it is he!"

There were tears in the earnest eyes of the girl as she touched softly the warm red mouth of her friend.

"You are always so good to every one!" she whispered.

But Allan, when he left Edith, had not gone to his room. He found Deland and Dr. Mainton, and they went up to the latter's room for a sociable smoke ere retiring. Allan was determined to learn what it was that had betrayed his secret to Edith, and it was only through these friends he could do so without breaking his oath. Even then it might lead to dangerous ground, but he would be on his guard, and not let the conversation go too far. In any case, he must know just where he stood, and if there was any likelihood of his having let the secret out during those days of delirium.

When they told him to even the smallest item—for so he insisted—of what had passed his lips

during his illness, he drew a deep breath of gratitude for having said so little. Then he smoked on in silence for a few minutes. Neither of his companions would ask of him a solution of the mystery, but it was plain they expected some such thing. What, then, was their disappointment when he said, removing the cigar from between his lips and knocking the ashes off:

“If you are truly friends of mine, old fellows, you’ll give me your hands on never breathing this to a living soul until twelve months have passed. At the end of that time, I will tell you as much as I can about this mystery. I would tell you now, for you have been good friends in truth to me, but I cannot. The telling would endanger not my life alone, but one dearer to me than any other! You understand?”

They nodded gravely, but as utterly, if not more, mystified than before; and by and by they separated, too, and the house was silent in night.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. MONTGOMERY AT HOME.

Allan, who knew as much of Mr. Montgomery's home and habits as those at the hotel could tell him, started off the day following the understanding between himself and Edith. He went directly to Montgomery's home, just on the outskirts of Montreal, to learn there if he had returned. Not that he had much faith in his having done so, but that whether or not he should find him would confirm him in his fears as to the harm fallen upon him through the same source as that with which he was met on his arrival in the mountains.

Therefore, he was not surprised when he was informed at his home that Mr. Montgomery had indeed not returned, but had sent—and this did surprise him—a message to the effect that he would be at home the following day. This was welcome news to Allan, though he could not come to any satisfactory explanation as to

the silence following his mysterious disappearance.

“It’s as strange as others doubtless think my silence about that night!” said Allan, to himself, as he returned to the hotel in the city, where he had engaged a room before starting out to look after his friend.—“But it is welcome news indeed. My fears are so proved groundless. Undoubtedly, my unfortunate adventure was due to the lateness of the hour and my traveling alone. It is scarcely probable that the same thing would occur in the daytime or if one were accompanied. It was just because things happened to be as they were. But I wish to Heaven,” he added, with sudden vehemence, “that it had not happened! There is something horrible in the thought that I hold it in my power to, perhaps, prevent other such crimes, and am helpless because I am bound by this oath into silence! This return of Montgomery, though, makes it all right for my return to the lake and to Edith. Dear girl! How trustful she is, if she gives way to her feelings!”

On the next day, Allan again presented him-

self at the residence of Mr. Montgomery. This was a beautiful estate with large grounds ; trees, almost as many and huge as those through which Allan made that memorable ride, and a rambling old gray stone-house, with gables and turrets, and wide balconies where the lights made soft play with the shadows. The mere keeping up of such an estate would demand a small fortune ; therefore, Allan told himself as he rode up the drive, this man must, indeed, have even greater wealth than he had dreamed of his possessing.

“ I have always considered myself pretty solid as to the ground under my feet,” said Allan, laughing, as he gazed over the stretch of lawn with the wooded land beyond ; “ but after this I shall have to take a back seat ! You’re a lucky fellow, Arthur Montgomery, of Canada, and I wonder that no woman has been found to share your good fortune !”

Mr. Montgomery had arrived, yes, in the early morning, but was intensely fatigued, and would not be down for an hour, the man said at the door.

“ But if you will take up my card I think he

will see me at once," said Allan, considerably put out at this delay.

The man lifted his eyebrows, and took the card, drawing aside the curtains in a doorway leading to a dainty ante-room.

"If the gentleman will wait, I will see," he said.

Allan looked about him as he waited. He had a great curiosity about the man since their sudden meeting and parting, and it would be a strange domain, he said, carelessly, for a coward's home—this exquisite old place! The room into which he was shown was small, but so charmingly decorated and arranged that it must be the home of a woman. Whether this man's mother or sister, it bore the unmistakable marks of a woman's presence. No bachelor house could betray such exquisite little touches as were upon everything.

When the man returned, he was a shade more obsequious, and held aside the curtain for Allan to pass through as he announced, in his slow, soft voice, that Mr. Montgomery would see the gentleman in his room.

Montgomery had not gotten out of bed yet as Allan entered, but he welcomed him with both

hands, and motioned him to a chair beside the bed.

“I’m a lazy fellow!” he said, gayly. There was a new and strange expression on his face. His usually frank blue eyes could not rest for long upon the brown eyes of his visitor. “I’ve had such a pull for it getting here that I made up my mind on the way that I would stay in bed for the remainder of my life! How are you, Mr. Mansfield? You are not looking as well as when I saw you last—” He ended the sentence in an awkward pause, a flush coming to his face. Then he added, lightly: “I trust you have not been ill, Mr. Mansfield?”

Allan did not at once reply. He was pondering in his mind what course he should pursue to solve the mystery attending the other’s departure from the hotel. Then, with a laugh that was half embarrassed, half good comradeship, he said, leaning forward, with steady eyes upon his host:

“Look here, Montgomery, you will pardon me if I am breaking any rule of politeness, but it is deuced queer why you went off as you did! Don’t you know, man, that it set the hotel by the ears, and kept the guides busy hunting for you

over the mountain, besides the anxiety of your friends—”

Mr. Montgomery stretched out his hand and silenced him. There was a strange pallor on his face and a flickering light in his eyes. But his gaze now was as steady as Allan's.

“Hold on, Mansfield,” he said, a slight hesitation in his voice. “Don't judge a fellow harshly till you know of what you judge! I am of the opinion that you have been through pretty much the same scrape as I, and you can, therefore, have more sympathy. Give me a moment's breathing space, and you shall hear. It is one of the most marvelous things I ever read or heard of! Robin Hood of the old adventurous stories is as nothing beside this that has occurred in our enlightened age.” He shrugged his shoulders and gave the pillow under his head an energetic thump, as though to free himself of some smothered wrath.

“I see by your looks,” he added, presently, his eyes once more keenly searching his listener's face, “that what I have only surmised during the past few weeks is true about yourself. I am not specially curious. When you said you arrived at the hotel in the early morning and

would give no account of yourself, I thought that your own business; but there was something in your face that I could not comprehend—something as though you were afraid to speak; and yet I knew by hearsay, and judged from your appearance when I saw you, that you were no coward. You will pardon my speaking so frankly. Before I have done you will understand why I do so. I have good reason for all that I have said and will say.

“To go back to the afternoon we went up the mountain to search for Miss Hallston. I had received a considerable shock in regard to some personal matter, and was not in a specially good humor that day. It was a shock so severe that I would have gone away from the hotel then and there but for the reason that I would not show that I cared. I cannot explain this more fully at present. Perhaps before I have done and we part company, I shall be able to tell you more fully about what I mean. Just now I have something of more importance than personal matters to speak about.”

Allan's face betrayed his excitement. He felt instinctively what was coming, and leaned for-

ward quite motionless, his eyes upon Montgomery.

“As I said,” continued Mr. Montgomery, and he made himself more comfortable upon the pillows, more as though he were excited than as though he particularly cared for his comfort, “that day on the mountain when you started down the path with Miss Hallston, I stood for a minute watching you, and some foolish old memory came back to me, and I could not bring myself to follow at once. When I did start to follow you—I had half made up my mind never to go back to the hotel anyway—the rain was coming down like all possessed, and I pulled up the collar of my coat and was just making a dive down the path, when, through the rain and the gathering darkness, a couple of men sprang upon me, choked me, and would have tied me, but decided between them that by so doing they would render me helpless, and as the woods were so heavy, they could not well manage to get me along. They had revolvers, and laughed among themselves to think that they were better than ropes or gags, and got off some jokes to

that effect, which I failed to appreciate under the circumstances.

“Of course, it was a most daring thing to do, but the gathering darkness and the storm were with them, and I might as well have been in the heart of a desert as within those few feet of you. They were masked and looked like pretty old customers, and I had little hope of getting out of their clutches without a scratch for it.

“They were rather reckless, it seemed to me, in the way they talked to each other. They cracked jokes about my condition, and about the fine show I would make when they had done with me. They talked mysteriously of some other whom they would riddle pretty well some day in spite of the woman. They laughed coarsely when they said these things, and were like the vigilants in their watch over me. I couldn't have ventured to move unnecessarily without a bullet through me, as I very well knew. As to the storm, they minded that not at all. They were bent on mischief, and seemed to think of nothing else.

“I couldn't help thinking, and I must confess that it gave me a sort of grim satisfaction, that

now it was needless for me to plan for not returning to the hotel, as I was in no danger of doing that very soon. I was not at all deceived as to my position, for I knew very well that such men would not undergo the penalty of imprisonment for the mere fun of capturing me. I even went so far as to consider whether it would not end in the loss of my life. But I wasn't particularly fascinated with my life, and that gave me, truly, little concern. Don't think I am bragging, Mansfield," he added, earnestly, a flush slowly creeping to his face. "I know some have given me the character of coward, but I can, I think, honestly say that I am not one. Not that it was any show of bravery to say that I did not much care if the adventure should end in death, for I was desperate with my life, and held it too lightly to care for consequences. Perhaps if it had been a happier life I might have shown some trace of the cowardice of which I am accused."

"None of your friends believe such a thing of you, I am sure," Allan said, kindly, for he was strangely attracted toward the man. "I know

that Miss Hallston holds you in great esteem, Montgomery."

Mr. Montgomery smiled coldly. A slight sneer touched his lips. He was not the frank fellow of a moment before.

"Miss Hallston is good to every one," he said, quietly. "She could have no hard thoughts for any one. But, as to that, I do not hang upon the verdict of any woman. I judge myself by my own conscience, and my code of honor. You're a brave fellow, Mansfield. I am not flattering you. I like you and trust you, or you would not now hear this story of mine. It's a deuced strange story, and may strike a chord in your own heart. I rather believe it will, or I might not even now tell you. As you know about the storm, there is no reason for my going over that. The darkness was rather alarming to me. I preferred to know where I was being taken. Of course, that would be difficult of certain knowledge, under the circumstances, for the wood is so wild and so tangled one would scarcely be able to swear by the path at the best of times.

"Anyway, we went through this darkness as

though there was not one inch of ground that the men did not thoroughly know, and I walked between them in an undivided state of mind, bordering on the ridiculous. I never made the slightest movement of escape, for I knew that would only end in immediate death, and when Death came so close I conceived the plan of outwitting him! I am a sort of a dare-devil any way, Mansfield, so unlike me as doubtless you think it!" he said, smiling. "But I kept my eyes about me, and my wits, as well as I could.

"After a little, we came in sight of you and Miss Hallston. Don't look surprised, Mansfield. I know what I tell you will come in with what you already know or I would not tell you. You never guessed that I was so near, nor the strange manner of my approach to you! I could not at first make out what my guides meant by their queer movements then. The man ahead turned around to his companion and nodded several times, in a grim, satisfied sort of way, as though it were the fulfilling of an object. Why that thought should have come to me as it did, in a flash, I could not know. But I watched them with considerably more interest. I saw

you and Miss Hallston hurrying along, and, of course, heard you shout for me, but I was, at the time, not in a condition to reply!" He laughed with grim mirth, and reached out to lay his hand over one of Allan's, on the arm of his chair, his face growing instantly grave.

"Look here, old fellow," he said, earnestly, "I hold no ill-will toward you. I would have saved you if I could. I did try as it was, and came near getting their revenge! But when you were shot, did you think for an instant whose hand held the weapon? When the thing was done, it was like a flash. I never guessed they were on your track till that instant, when the leader suddenly aimed and fired. I could have killed him had I not known my death would instantly follow. I had them in my power if ever I should escape, I told myself, trying to argue away my failure to save you. But I managed to trip the fellow, I hardly know how, at the instant of the report, and the ball went a trifle astray. You didn't think that Montgomery was so near the revolver! And you don't know"—his hand was warm and steady over Allan's hand—"how it hurt me to see you hurt. But you were not

dead; I had that consolation. And after that incident—the men argued with each other as to the probability of the wound's causing your death, anyway—we went on in another direction, they fearing, I suppose, that some one may have heard the shot, and would follow it up.

“They laughed—those friends—when we were some distance away from you, to think, they said, that they were even with the man in spite of the woman's chicken heart. What had they to do with old memories or old women? Their memory held on only when there was revenge to be had. Some way, all this came to me with the recollection of your late arrival at the hotel that morning, and the expression of your face when the subject was mentioned. But the men gave me no clew save that, and we went on through the woods in a ghastly sort of file, I think. And they went so slowly and by such a circuitous route that it was quite dark when at last we came out upon the lake—”

Allan leaned forward, interrupting him, grasping his hand excitedly.

“And there was a struggle, and shots were

fired, and some one was wounded!" he cried, his eyes flashing.

"Yes." Mr. Montgomery was equally excited. "How did you know of it, Mansfield? Why did no one try to discover what the row was? There would have been no mystery then. But I scarcely think it would have pleased me, either," he concluded, slowly. And silence fell upon them for a moment.

"Mrs. Castlemon and Miss Hallston heard the shots," Allan explained, gravely, for he had heard the story. "And Mrs. Castlemon told Deland, and had him search. They saw those marks, but could make nothing of it, and decided that it was absurd, and that the shots were fired by some returning party from the mountain."

"The ladies were very thoughtful," said Mr. Montgomery, icily. That strange sneering expression crept again around his lips. Then he shrugged his shoulders, and continued his strange story, which now became more intensely interesting than ever to Allan.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHY MONTGOMERY DISAPPEARED.

“When we got down to the lake,” said Montgomery, in continuation of his strange story, “I made up my mind it would be as good a time as any for an attempt to escape. So I kept very still, and the men walked so close to me I could scarcely step. But presently the man ahead of me stumbled and fell aside for one instant, and, although he recovered himself as quickly, with an oath, yet I had not lost that one small space of time. I think I made no noise. I know I heard my own heart beat for a moment thunderingly. Then I had sunk out of sight at the side of the carry in the lake. It was a cold bath, but I took it in desperation, and without, I am certain, making a sound to betray myself. It was the one place they would not think of searching for me; and I escaped. They fired ahead and behind, but as I was in neither direction, they had finally to go off considerably less exultant than

when they first came, cursing me and each other, and the luck that had tripped them.

“What their game was perhaps you know better than I do, Mansfield; but I had no doubt it was to get money, and might, perhaps, end in murder. As to the blood marks, I cannot account for them, unless the man behind shot the man ahead by mistake. I was not wounded. But I was considerably shaken up; and when at last I dared venture out of the water, I made a mad dash for the road. I had decided not to return to the hotel for various reasons, and to let them think that I had been lost, and was in all probability dead. That was not kind, you say? My dear fellow, you cannot judge for me in that until you know my reason.

“As to how I escaped finally—I ran along the road through the darkness—and the darkness was intense—till I came to one of the small houses away out toward the lonelier part of the road. Here I stopped and told my story. The people were poor. I had money enough about me to reward them pretty well, and this I did, with the solemn promise that they would not betray that I had been saved, no matter how

they were tempted to do so. They have kept their promise, I see. They shall not lose by it.

“Of course, I could not at once start for home, because I had not money enough in the first place, and because I wished to let the excitement die out a little before I attempted to leave the house. Then one night I was bundled into a wagon and was driven to Au Sable Forks, to get from there by horseback to the nearest railway station that would not betray me. As to that, though, I scarcely think my dearest friend would have recognized me in the slouchy, country fellow who boarded the train. At Plattsburgh, I telegraphed on for money, and it was sent me as speedily as wires could carry messages. There I refitted myself, and started for home yesterday, more like a civilized person than I had been in three weeks. You see me here.

“Now, what I am coming to, is this, my dear fellow. If you will not answer me, or if you cannot—I shall know you have good reason for whichever you adopt—I shall decide for myself as to the truth of my suspicion. The cause of your delay in reaching the hotel the night of

your arrival at the lake was due to some such adventure as mine. I have put two and two together—it is very simple—and have come to the conclusion that these very men captured you on the road, and maybe got you somewhere in the woods where they would have either robbed or murdered you, but for the timely interference of some woman. Don't think me at all penetrating, Mansfield, nor that I would ferret out any secret you may wish to keep; but that you escaped them in some way, and they attempted revenge upon you for this, by their effort to take your life on the mountain, I am certain. I have had experience with daring robbers pretty near home, but I never came so near the end of my journey as I did that one day. Will you tell me if I have rightly guessed of this, Mansfield, or can you not? I shall take either as you would wish me to, in the best belief of your own cause for silence or confession."

Allan did not at once reply. He had withdrawn his hand from Montgomery's, and had buried his face in it, his elbow upon the arm of his chair. Mr. Montgomery watched him in silence. He felt that he was passing through

some severe struggle, and would not interfere with his thoughts. After a few moments, Allan lifted his head and met the kind eyes of his friend fixed upon him.

“Montgomery,” he said, with a hoarse sound in his voice, his hand trembling somewhat as he reached it out toward the other’s extended hand, “believe me, I would tell you of that night, if I could. I cannot! I am under oath not to reveal one word of what I heard and saw and went through that night, till twelve months have passed. When they are over, I shall explain to those friends who are kindly interested and know already of something mysterious connected with my strange arrival. Until then, I must remain silent, with the threat of men who would not hesitate to go any length to keep their vengeance, that at one word of betrayal from me, not only will I be put to death, but so will the one whom I hold dearest in life! You may know who that one is! You have known Miss Hallston, and can judge what my thought of her is! She has given me the sweetest of promises, and it is for her I fear infinitely more—believe me—than for myself.”

Mr. Montgomery's hand-clasp was very warm and true as he said, gravely :

“I don't know why it is, Mansfield, that I should have so taken to you from the first moment of our meeting, but I feel as though we were old friends! As such, I hold your oath as sacred as you could do. I believe in you fully. Perhaps I have my own thoughts as to the adventure, but I have made up my mind to one thing. I had intended putting as vigilant a set of detectives on the track of those men as there is to be found, but now that I have heard what you have to say, I shall do nothing until those months have passed. Should I do it, it might fall upon you and your *fiancee* to receive their revenge! You can trust me with your life or her life for as long as my own shall last! I would not harm one hair of your heads! Miss Hallston is a beautiful woman, and could ask for no truer man upon whom to place her affection than yourself! I offer my heartiest congratulations.”

“And you should profit by my example,” said Allan, as he shook hands warmly with his friend. “There are other women very beauti-

ful and gracious and worth winning, Montgomery. Could you find one more charming than Miss Hallston's friend—"

"Than whom?" almost thundered Mr. Montgomery, dropping the hand he held, and starting back from him, a black look coming over his face. "Whom are you talking about, Mansfield?"

Allan was appalled. He had heard none of the rumors regarding this man and the beautiful woman so closely connected with the thought of Edith. He whitened and flushed, and was utterly discomfited for a moment. Then Mr. Montgomery regained his old manner, and laughed, rather awkwardly, it must be confessed, but with an effort at lightness.

"I am not a marrying man, Mansfield," he said, shrugging his broad shoulders. "The ladies are delightful for an hour's amusement, but I prefer, for life, the free bachelorhood I am now enjoying. It may sound treasonable to you at this time, but I know of what I speak."

"You can surely not know of whom I spoke, Montgomery," Allan said, rather sternly, indig-

nation flushing his face. "No one, certainly not even such an inveterate bachelor as yourself, could have other than the deepest respect and admiration for Miss Hallston's friend, Mrs. Castlemon."

The black look was again touching Mr. Montgomery's face, but he mastered it, and answered, still lightly:

"Mrs. Castlemon is a most adorable woman—most adorable of the sex, my dear fellow! As you just now remarked, no one could think otherwise. But bachelorhood for me!

"Bachelor's Hall, what a comical place it is!

the old song says. I agree with them there. I shall hold to it, too, I think, all my life. One is not likely to change one's nature at five-and-thirty, Mansfield."

"One might do worse than that," said Allan, in sturdy defence of Edith's friend. "Lots of men have done it, you know."

"Have changed their natures after five-and-thirty, you mean?" asked his host, gayly, turning his eyes, with an arch expression in them, upon Allan's half angry face. "So they have,

my dear fellow, but mostly, if you are a student of human nature, to their sorrow. They're more likely to be taken in at last, you see!"

"I know nothing of the sort," still persisted Allan, not at all comprehending this man, who had been called a coward and a hero in one breath.

"We'll not argue upon that point, Mansfield. I'm afraid you cannot change my views at present, and we're too good friends to split on such a rock. You're to make yourself at home. It is a surprise to see you here, but none the less delightful. I will have you shown to a room, and will then make myself presentable to show you the glories of *my* bachelor's hall. I think you will like the place. Every one who comes here goes away enchanted only to come again—as I sincerely hope will be the case with you. Oh, but you're not to mention such a thing as a hotel!" He caught Allan up sharply when he would have spoken. "No friend of mine—and such a good friend—shall ever say he remained at a hotel in a strange city while I have a house to offer him room! My dear fellow, we will have a pleasant time, I promise you. I am an adopted

native of Montreal, and can show you considerably more than you might otherwise see for a year. And I will promise you some sport and any number of beautiful ladies!" He laughed and reached out for the bell-rope. "You shall not say one word, I tell you, Mansfield! Every one obeys me—excepting the robbers of your mountains!" And, still laughing, he gave his order to the servant who answered his summons.

"I have been lazy long enough. You have given me new life," he said to Allan, as he was leaving the room with the servant. "I shall be with you before you have fully rested, Mansfield. It is almost the dinner hour, too. Hasn't the change of atmosphere given you an appetite? I never fail in that."

And, in truth, almost before Allan had become acquainted with the room assigned him—a large, airy, luxuriant room it was—Mr. Montgomery tapped at the door and entered.

"The more I think of it, the better it seems to have you with me," he said, genially. "I am more pleased than I can say, Mansfield. You shall have a glimpse of our Canadian hospitality

before I have done with you. Maybe I was an American and a Yankee at one time in my life, but I think I am as much of a native here as any among them. It is a very good place to stay in a part of the year, anyhow, as you shall acknowledge."

"If all are as hospitable as yourself, I shall have none but the best reports to make when I get back," Allan said, earnestly. "But I can stay only a day or so with you, Montgomery. I promised to return as soon as it was certain where you were. I cannot break my promise, you know."

Mr. Montgomery interrupted his smiling explanation.

"Nonsense, Mansfield. You are here, and shall stay until I allow you to go. Why not have out a gay party for a month or so? I shall be delighted, and it will save the great call for your return. I cannot lose my friend, now I have found him."

"What shall I say?" returned Allan, laughing. "I am in the robber's castle now, and must submit, I suppose. Will you have out any one I know?"

“Of course I shall have out some of our friends at the old hotel,” he said, in great amusement. Then his face suddenly hardened. “Even Mrs. Castlemon!” he added, grimly, as though between his teeth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE MASQUERADE.

The summer had passed. Midwinter had come. It was the height of the season in New York. Edith Hallston and her friend were as usual the centre of their acquaintances. They were full of life, and had one of the most brilliant houses in the city. There was never a dull moment for any one in their group of guests. Both these beautiful women were the best of hostesses. There were few who sent regrets to an invitation from them.

It was at a masquerade at which Edith and Mrs. Castlemon, Allan, and most of those who met at the Adirondack hotel were present. Edith

was dressed as *Ophelia*, and very beautiful she was, with her brilliant eyes shining between the slits in her gauze mask. She was full of life, and the tantalizing whispers she uttered in many ears, as she glided among the guests, set many a smile upon incongruous faces. For instance, even odious *Blue Beard* could not help softening to her, and pretty *Red Riding Hood's* wolf gave up much of his ferocious expression, when she leaned behind his chair to whisper a laughing taunt.

Mrs. Castlemon was *Desdemona*. She could not have chosen a more perfect character for herself. Her exquisite complexion and large, black eyes were full of the dreaming supposed to characterize the woman to whom Othello poured out his tale of adventure. Many of her friends had guessed who she was ere the masks were removed. Mr. Montgomery, as a robber of the olden time, had long ago discovered who the beautiful woman was. And Mr. Montgomery took occasion to stab her with other than a poisoned dagger. There is tragedy off the stage sometimes.

“You cannot deceive me, Edith,” whispered a low voice beside the forlorn *Ophelia*, as she was

flitting past *Julius Cæsar*. "You couldn't deceive me if you were hidden in the countless wrappings of a mummy. I should discover you wherever and whatever you were. They say that love is blind, but I doubt it."

"You should have proof before you swear!" was the gay whisper, as *Ophelia*, with her romantic bouquet and incongruous air of melancholy, disappeared among the maskers.

"And even *Desdemona* can be gay!" said a deep voice to Mrs. Castlemon, as she stood for a moment beside a group of palms at one end of the long rooms brilliant with lights and costumes. "The years bring solace to many sore hearts. Even the Moor can say that. What has treachery to do with eternity?"

Even under the mask the agitation on the beautiful face was seen by the keen blue eyes searching her face. She lifted up her head for a moment as though she would brave anything that could come upon her; but there was such a sickening feeling of horror and pain upon her that the beautiful proud head slowly drooped, and the shadows fell over the pallid face under the mask. Her hands were convul-

sively grasping a fold of her dress, but not an answering word did she attempt to utter in her defense.

“Did Miss Hallston’s beautiful friend think she could hide herself forever from the eyes of the man who had sworn that all women are false and cruel, and certain to draw their own destruction upon them if given but time? Did the charming Mrs. Castlemon not feel assured that there must come a time of reckoning, when even her cold pride would falter and she must face the world at her worst? Did the woman whom men flatter and worship—pah!—think that all men are fools? Desdemona was false! It is an excellent character for this charming widow to assume.”

Mrs. Castlemon turned upon him suddenly, all her old spirit in the flaming black eyes behind the mask. She reached out one small, white hand in scorn, and cried, in her hushed, sweet, exquisite voice:

“Robbers are often murderers! Your character was also well chosen, Monsieur *Robin Hood*! The Moor was treacherous or Desdemona would have never been so cruelly murdered!

She had a heart, as he proved with his dagger! Wound as you will, noble robber, there is always balm in the knowledge of one's innocence! The poor little princes in the tower were more to be envied than the men who put them out of the world!"

A scornful laugh fell faintly from behind the robber's mask, and the broad shoulders were disdainfully shrugged.

"Words! words! words! What are they? Is there any woman who is not proficient in such? The dagger is sometimes more kind than the king, O beautiful *Desdemona!*"

"And who mourned for the woman when she was dead?" asked the low voice, that was now quite steady and sweet, but with a note of pain that would have struck any one who loved her. "Could the Moor bring back, by his bitter cry, the life he had taken? When one is dead, one can never come back to grant forgiveness or take the love that is offered too late. A noble man would be sure of the worst ere he accepted such from the lips of any one against one he loved. *Ophelia* yonder may better sympathize with you in your fine sarcasm, Sir Robber. *Des-*

demonia can think of nothing but the wonderful tales of Othello.”

She seemed to drift away from him with indescribable grace and melt among the throng. Many masks addressed her, and soft, whispered words gave tongue to a heart that could find no words to utter love beyond the shelter of masks. The man she left by the palms watched her almost unconsciously. What was there in the musical voice that rang truth through the words? Was he growing sentimental? Were Allan Mansfield's words coming true of him, that the nature of many men had been changed after five-and-thirty? He laughed contemptuously as he turned away to join the merry maskers, and there were pretty words and pretty eyes to answer his sallies as he went here and there rather aimlessly, with the recollection of those few sharp words under the palms.

He had laughed to himself during Allan's visit to him the previous summer, when they had sent their invitations for the gay party to come to his estate. The party was successful, and made the old house ring with gayety. There were bright eyes and soft laughter and voices through

the rooms and upon the lawn, but the brilliant eyes of yonder *Desdemona* and the fair *Ophelia* were not among them. He had been obliged to detain Allan by sheer force of politeness, when it was known that neither of those beautiful women accepted the generous invitation extended them, together with their friends. And he had gone back to the Adirondack hotel after all, before the month was up. He was pretty certain that the invitation would not—nay, could not be accepted, but he had a daring soul under his frank manner, and if those women dared accept, he certainly dared extend an invitation!

He gnawed his mustache rather savagely as he went on through the crowd, scarcely answering the soft whispers that floated past him. His eyes, dark with some angry thought, followed the beautiful *Desdemona* among the brilliant groups. He did not understand why she should so have overcome his pride! She was still the Mrs. Castlemon she was the summer before! She had not changed any more than he had changed. But had he not changed? Certainly there had been no such restlessness in his heart when he saw her, so beautiful and so cold,

among the mountains. She had seemed so indifferent to him, why could not he keep that cold feeling in his heart toward her? Surely, she had given him reason to hate her, to despise her, to shut her out of his life as completely as one could shut out forever the memory of a beautiful dream.

He would have made an excellent Moor, with his frowning brows, as he went down the rooms, scarcely stopping to answer the drifting words around him. There was something so fierce and so unlike himself in his very step, as he passed through the crowd, that he was unrecognized by all, save this one woman.

“Humph!” he said to himself, his eyes still following the beautiful mask, “but I made her suffer! There are stabs keener than the touch of a dagger, in truth, my charming widow.”

His voice was cruel; his eyes were cruel; his very lips shut cruelly over his words, as though they were too dark for the light of day or the light of truth.

After awhile he paused alone in the shadow of the outer staircase, and stood moodily watching the gay crowd floating through the rooms under

the soft gaslight and the more tender flicker of colored lanterns among the palms and at the entrance to the conservatory beyond. It was a gay scene, in truth, but his heart was too dark to take pleasure in such. He was fighting over again an old battle, and he was fearing defeat as he stood in the shadow.

“How many men would believe her and let the past die,” he muttered, and still his eyes sought for the proud, graceful figure among the others. “How such women must laugh at the fools who swear by them. If she were true, she would be worth it, though,” he added, savagely. “But she isn’t true, and a man is a fool indeed who would trust her. She truly should talk of daggers. And the conscience of the princes in the tower must comfort her like the sting of a serpent.”

Again he laughed shortly, and savagely gnawed his mustache.

By degrees his gaze left the one beautiful figure, and caught here and there the well-known manners of one or another that proved the identity of the masker in spite of the screen so like a taunt of daring. Edith Hallston, as the music

for the dance drifted through the rooms, floated past him with *Julius Cæsar*. He smiled grimly as he watched them in their happiness. He could have found it in his heart to have envied them that night. Deland was coming down the room. It was Deland, of course. And the pretty little figure beside him was, of course, no one but the Miss Camden he had heard so much about, the Miss Camden whom he could never forget because she came so strangely into his life on that black day. Could he ever forget that day, or those who were associated with it?

He shrugged his shoulders with a laugh, saying to himself that men and women were fools to think they could deceive others with a film of mask upon their faces. Were there any there whom he could not place if he had ever met them? He would see, he said lightly. He could not enter the dance with his heart in its present state, and he would prove how shallow the world was while he stood apart from it and had no pleasure in its gayety.

Some half-dozen of his friends and acquaintances perhaps he had placed, and was almost forgetting the anger in his heart, when one of the

maskers came up, and paused just there as the music stopped, his face full turned toward the man in the shadows. With a smothered exclamation, Mr. Montgomery grasped the pillar beside him, bending forward as though drawn by some strange attraction to the one figure in the throng.

Where had he seen that tawny beard and the square jaw and the broad shoulders atop of the magnificent figure? Where had they come upon him with something of unpleasant sensation? What was he more than any other stranger among the others? It was very absurd. This sharp raillery with the masked *Desdemona* had wrought upon him until he was no longer himself, but like some silly fool to be moved at the slightest trifle.

Ophelia with her bouquet of rosemary and pansies was the strange mask's partner. Montgomery glanced sharply from her pretty, lifted face, shaded by the scrap of lace, to the bending face above her, with but this tawny mustache and square jaw visible even to his keen eyes. It was more than a passing fancy. He could not shake off the feeling that the man before him was in

some way mixed in his life. Then it came to him with the flashing of these lightning thoughts.

All thought of *Desdemona* was gone. He was filled only with the knowledge that had so flashed upon him. He could not for the moment move or utter a sound. It was such a marvelous thing, this that was dawning upon him. Where was Allan that he did not take better care of the girl whom he swore he loved so intensely? Could he not, with the penetration of such a heart, have seen the danger about the girl? Could he not feel with the indescribable instinct that should be born of love—have known where and with whom pretty *Ophelia* was dancing?

Mr. Montgomery started to enter the rooms and seek Allan to whom he would impart this secret he had discovered. His face, even masked as it was, betrayed his great agitation. As he was turning away from the shade of the staircase, a light hand touched his arm—just touched it like a snow-flake, and was removed. He turned swift as thought. Only a meek little nun with her soft, gray gown, and the rosary in her fingers, stood beside him. Not a trace of

her features was visible under the thick lace mask she wore, but there was something in the lifted, shy eyes that held Mr. Montgomery at her side.

“So, the shadows attract the pretty Sisters, too?” he said, gently, a smile breaking the rigid face. “But my little shadowy nun should go into the light. There are many among the maskers who would draw her away from the convent veil.”

How could he know that these trivial words would so affect her? She staggered for one instant, her hands dropping the rosary and lifted toward him as though to keep off some blow; then she held to the pillar with those trembling hands that fluttered like twin birds, the soft gray of her domino rising and falling swiftly over her fiercely beating heart. How could he know his words would so startle and affect her? With quick kindness he would have steadied her with his own strong arm, and even laid his hands upon hers, as though to give her strength and courage, but she drew hers quickly away, and hid them behind her, recovering her self-

command enough to stand quite motionless with bent head.

“My poor little Sister is faint? Will she allow a wild robber to bring her water? Or wine, perhaps, would be the best—”

Once more she lifted her hands as though to keep off some blow, and trembled so that his heart was deeply sorry for her.

“You are agitated, child,” he would have so spoken to his own sister, he said to himself, and was glad to think of this afterward. “Let me do something for you! I shall be glad to help you, believe me!”

She regained her self-control, and lifted her face steadily to his, though there could be seen nothing save the perfect softness of the round, white throat, and the gently molded chin.

“You are kind,” she whispered; and the voice was quite strange to him, keen though his ears might be. “I need nothing. The convent walls are still strong for aid to those who seek them. I have come only to whisper a warning. You have a friend here. He is handsome and honorable and happy. The girl he loves is with

SHE REGAINED HER SELF-CONTROL, AND LIFTED HER FACE STEADILY TO HIS.—See Page 304.



him. Not now, but she has been," She spoke in stiff sentences, and so softly he could but catch the words. "I tell you because you know why I wish him to understand. If he would save his life, and the life of the one dearest to him—tell him that; he will remember—he must leave here soon and unseen. You are his friend. I trust you."

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE CONSERVATORY.

Montgomery would have detained the little nun, but when he turned, she was nowhere in sight.

"What a deuced set of surprises there have come to-night!" he said to himself, as he entered again the brilliance of the rooms beyond. "What will Mansfield say, and I wonder how she, that little nun, could know of this danger threatening him? It must be the appearance of that mask is connected with it in some way, but how

she can know of it— But there was a woman in the adventure! Of course; and why shouldn't she be a pretty woman? The mystery thickens."

Julius Cæsar and *Desdemona* were flying down the rooms in a waltz as Montgomery gained a position where the dancers were in sight. *Ophelia* still held as her partner the strange *Macbeth*. Montgomery wondered how he could attract Mansfield's attention without also the attention of his partner and others. *Desdemona*, it was likely, would keep out of his way, and unless he could get Allan from her side he could not hope to deliver the message. For that he should deliver the message, in spite of the strange messenger, he had not a doubt. He had recognized the stalwart *Macbeth* too well to delay delivering the message of warning longer than necessary.

The waltz was presently done, and some of the couples left the dance to wander to the conservatory beyond or to other partners, and to flutter again among the arch figures bent on mischief. Allan and his partner turned down toward where Montgomery was standing, and as Allan caught sight of him he bent to the beauti-

ful woman beside him and whispered some word as though he would hasten her approach to his friend. But, with a woman's perverseness, she shook her head, and he turned with her back toward the conservatory.

Arthur Montgomery, watching so intently and with such a fear in his heart, could have killed her if a look would kill, as he muttered to himself that he would have to follow them and give his message boldly before her. He was so certain there was need to deliver the message before the masks were removed. The woman would not have come to him if there had not truly been need. He had full confidence in her in some strange way.

Therefore, seeing them turn from him at *Desdemona's* wish, he bit his lip, and followed them as swiftly as was possible through the crowd. They must reach the conservatory before he reached them.

They turned down the shadowy pine aisle as Mr. Montgomery entered, close upon them, and he turned away through the geranium border to so come upon them ahead, thus making it impossible for them to escape him. The music floated

bewilderingly through the scented dusk, where the colored lanterns made but a soft twilight, and the echo of the voices and laughter and light feet were like the echoes of a dream.

He saw them just in front of him as he turned up into their path. He forgot his mask, and that the woman beside his friend was the one out of all the world he could wish away. He beckoned to Allan, and he, seeing him, nodded and drew his companion down toward him. What was it at that moment that flashed among the shrubbery and the glistening leaves of palm? What was it that sent the life-blood sweeping back to Arthur Montgomery's heart, and every trace of color to leave his face?

He caught his breath like a man who is suffocating, and then, lithe as a tiger, he was upon the dark form hidden in the palm shadows, and there was the flash of steel, and a sudden silence as though death had fallen upon everything there save the flowers.

Arthur Montgomery was grasping the lifted arm of the man with the tawny beard and the square jaw, and had torn from his face the shield-

ing mask, and was then like a man turned to stone.

“Look!” he cried, and Allan and his companion stopped where they were, with the great amazement of this startling scene in the heart of that beauty. “Look, Mansfield! Come here! I have my robber, and yours also!”

Was this the man they had called a coward? Was this the man who could have sworn there was no good in the world? Allan for a moment could not move or collect his senses in his great surprise. Then he sprang to the help of his friend, for he knew there must be a struggle. But ere he could reach him, the strong arm that held the revolver that had so betrayed him once more was wrenched free, and there was a deafening report that sent a shiver through the quiet silence, and for a moment blinded them in smoke. Then Allan sprang to Arthur's side and they struggled for the possession of the weapon.

The aim was intended for Allan's heart, but Montgomery had turned aside the aim with one stroke of his own powerful arm, and the struggle must be, for the would-be murderer, two against one; *Desdemona* stood by for an instant like one

of the statues themselves, her eyes upon the stranger. Then, reaching out her hands, as though for help, but utterly unnoticed by the men struggling but a few feet from her, she sank down among the palms as though she were struck with death. But no one noticed her!

The struggle was not long, but it was fearful while it lasted. All the men were strong, but the man struggling for his life fought with a desperation that must shortly end in victory. A swarm of excited maskers crowded down the paths, with exclamations and cries of curiosity or alarm as the scene opened before them. As they came in sight, the man, with one last desperate struggle, wrenched his arm loose from the hold Montgomery had upon it, and with swift aim leveled the weapon full in Allan's face.

A horrified cry was blended with the scream of a woman, as *Ophelia* pushed her way through the crowding guests, and, at the same moment, two reports rang out through the green-house.

A scene of indescribable confusion ensued. Ladies shrieked and fainted; some, with more courage than the rest, ran to the insensible figure of beautiful *Desdemona* upon the ground, and

raised her head; others, with still greater self-control, pressed up to the very scene of the horror. Masks were recklessly torn away from pretty faces, now pallid with fear; nothing was remembered but the terrible act that had closed the drama of a life.

“I thought you were gone this time for certain!” cried Arthur Montgomery, as he stepped back from the man lying in his own life-blood upon the ground. “I would not have gone through this scene for a whole life’s happiness.”

“It was your thoughtfulness that saved me,” answered Allan, hoarsely, as Edith’s soft hands were clasped around his arm, and Edith’s beautiful, pallid face was raised to search for any harm done him. “He must have succeeded but for you.”

“But, oh! it was dreadful—dreadful!” she whispered, her voice broken by tears. “I thought I must be too late, Allan. He was so close to you and I seemed so far away.”

“I must have seen you die before my eyes without being able to help you,” said Montgomery, in a low tone, breathing hard, “for he held my nearest arm as though it was in a vise. But

thank Heaven, indeed, that you are alive. It is the most wonderful rescue, Mansfield. A few inches higher, and he would have succeeded. I saw him in the crowd. I could never forget that beard and the heavy jaw. Miss Hallston was his partner, too, at the time, and I was but just conscious who he was, when one of the maskers came to me—a gentle little nun she was—and told me to warn you. I came at once, but in this crowd you know how almost impossible it was to reach you, especially”—a dark shadow fell upon his face—“when you would not come to me inside there.”

“But, oh! take me away from here quickly, Allan—do!” whispered Edith, feeling a deadly faintness upon her. “It is terrible! Why don’t they get him away? How can they let him lie there, as though—”

“Hush!” said Allan, softly, placing his arm around her, and making a way for themselves through the crowd that was pressing up to Allan excitedly. “He is dead, my dearest. He died by his own hand, and not by any of ours, thank God.”

As Montgomery turned away to let them pass

through to purer air and out of the excitement, he caught sight of beautiful *Desdemona* where she had fallen upon the ground, with her head tenderly lifted to Miss Camden's shoulder, while some one had gone for water to revive her. Around the horrible figure of death upon the floor not far from her the crowd had gathered, with the strange fascination murder holds for the thoughtless. He had died by his own hand, but he would 'have fulfilled his revenge even before he took his own life had not Edith, in one wild concentration of strength and desperation, brought her full weight upon the lifted arm so that it fell to one side, and the bullet turned to one side. He had shaken her off fiercely, and placed the muzzle of the weapon against his own temple, and had so gone out of life, while yet the crowd was pressing toward them.

"I could find it in my heart to hate her!" muttered Mr. Montgomery, bitterly, his eyes upon the beautiful, cold, still face resting against gentle Miss Camden's shoulder.

"Have mercy upon him!" cried a voice beside him, scarcely audible in the excitement around them.

It was the little nun in the gray domino, with the long mask over her face, one hand holding the rosary, the other pressed against her side.

CHAPTER XX.

THE UNVAILING OF MYSTERY.

As Montgomery turned toward the nun, he saw her reel, and she reached out her hands toward him gropingly as though she could not see. He went to her instantly and supported her with as much tenderness as though she were in truth one of the gentle Sisters of the convent.

“You are ill?” he said, his voice shaken with emotion. “Let me take you out of this stifling atmosphere.”

She looked up at him, as she whispered, faintly:

“Will you remove the mask, please, Mr. Montgomery? He—shot—me—”

“Is it possible!” he exclaimed. “Why did you not tell me at once? My poor girl! And you saved their lives—”

She shook her head, a faint smile upon her lips as he bared the pallid face to the colored lights swinging overhead.

“It was nothing,” she said. “If you will get me some water—I will be better at once! I—am sure—I cannot die until I have righted some of—this terrible wrong—”

“Hush!” he said, gently. “You shall not die if we can help you, my poor, brave girl.”

He lifted her as though she were a child, and bore her through one of the glass-doors at the side into a small room beyond the parlors. Here he laid her upon a couch, and hurried out for a glass of water, ordering wine brought to him instantly in the conservatory room. When he returned, the nun was insensible among the cushions, her hand fallen from her side, revealing a dull, red stain upon the gray of her domino. With infinite pity he raised her head to his arm and sprinkled some of the water upon her face. One of the waiters brought in wine and set it ready to his hand.

“Send Mr. Mansfield and Miss Hallston here quickly!” said Montgomery, scarcely knowing what he said. He could not comprehend the words of the woman, and remembered that this might be more for Allan’s solving than his own.

When they entered, Edith very white but calm, and Allan greatly moved by the few words of the man who delivered the message, the nun had regained consciousness, and was, still with her head upon Mr. Montgomery’s arm, trying to recover her voice and composure. When her eyes fell upon Allan, the color rushed to her face. Allan’s face paled as he recognized her.

Bending above her, he said, tenderly :

“My brave savior, my poor little woman, how did you come here? What brought you, of all persons, here to-night?”

Her voice was weak, but she commanded it as best she could to answer. — Montgomery had sent the waiter to telephone for a physician at once, and prayed that one would come quickly.

“I came,” said the soft, low voice—“I came, Allan Mansfield—to save you and—the one who

is—dearest to you—in the world. I knew—this—that has come must soon come. I knew they—had not kept their word to me—that you should not—be harmed. I have watched you—since—as best I could. I would not let them—take your life, if it were possible—to prevent it.”

Her voice died out in weakness, but she shook her head when they would have kept her silent.

“I must tell it,” she said, faintly—so faintly they could but just catch the words.

“I know as well as you, that I have but a few moments at best. I could not die without speaking. Had I lived, I should indeed have sought—the rest beyond the convent walls. You”—her eyes were upon Allan’s face, and she made a weak attempt to reach out her hand toward his, which he, seeing, knelt beside the couch, and took the weak little hand close in his—“you did not recognize me that night—that they brought you—to my home. I knew you from the watch you carried, at first; afterward, I could see your—mother’s face in yours.”

The voice faltered once more, and again Montgomery raised the wine to her lips.

“He is dead,” she whispered, with a shudder,

turning her head aside. "He is dead by his own hand. I have nothing to say. He deserved it, maybe you will say, but—he was my husband! You do not know me, Allan Mansfield. You were a tiny child when I left your mother's house to marry that man in there." She shivered, and her voice died out for an instant. "No one knew what he was. He assured us that he was in an excellent business, and I believed him. Your mother believed him, too. When I found that he was a robber and murderer—what could I do? I could not leave him—I dared not betray him—and I would not let the woman who had been more than a mother to me guess what my life was.

"You were too young to remember me—the maid whom your mother kept with her—whom she treated always as though she were more than an attendant. She was heavenly kind to me. She took me from the orphan asylum and educated me and brought me up beside her, and I would have died for her.

"When you came to me that night, I could not believe my senses. I knew for what they had brought you, and I determined to save you, if

there was any power in a woman's pleading. You know the result. After you were gone, I did what I could to follow your life. I was afraid of their promise. I knew that such men would not hesitate to break their word for their own sakes. They feared you because of the power you held over them, in spite of your oath.

“No one was living who knew aught of our den or our life save yourself, and they would put it out of your power to harm them. So we came to New York. New York is a large city, and no one would know from what or where we came, if we did not choose that they should. Our story was plausible. We were from the West. We had made our money on a ranch and had come to spend it now we were older. They took us for what we appeared. We had money, and we bought our way in. We have met you before to-night, but you did not know it. We have been in the same society that you have been in, and not one among you dreamed that a robber and murderer was in your midst.”

Again Mr. Montgomery held the wine against the pallid lips fast growing stiff in the presence of the great Angel. His eyes were marvelously

soft with the pity in his heart, and as she glanced up to him, a smile broke the pallor of her face.

“I have come to take away the pain in your life, too,” she said, faintly.

He thought her wandering. Death was so close upon her, life was fading, it must be.

“You must not think of me,” he said, gently. “You must keep what strength you have to help the doctor when he comes.”

“I may not speak for your sake so much as for the woman you have wronged,” she said, steadily as she could command her words. She saw the startled look come into his eyes, and smiled her faint smile. “I am a woman and have been wronged; she is a woman, too, and you have done her the greatest wrong. You can restore the peace if not the full trust and the memory of what she has suffered! Only one word more have I to say to Allan Mansfield, and I must say that ere I speak to you. Your mother has heard no word of me from the day I left your home. She may think me dead or that I have forgotten her. She could not dream of the truth. Do not tell her, I entreat you! I loved her, I love her still too much to let her

know the depth to which I fell. Tell her I am dead, and died at peace with all. Tell her I have never forgotten her—that I must remember her, even in the new world opening to me. Tell her that her name was last upon my heart!”

Edith was weeping softly, and her hand brushed tenderly the hair that had fallen upon the face resting on Montgomery’s arm. For a moment there was no sound save the heavy breathing of the woman and the rustle of Edith’s dress upon the floor. Then the woman moved her head so that she could meet Arthur Montgomery’s eyes, and said, very faintly now :

“Do you know that you might have broken her heart—the beautiful woman in there who fell when she caught sight of him? Don’t you know that she could be nothing but the truest and best and noblest of women? Do you think she would have gone away from your home as she did, taking nothing with her but her beauty and innocence, and the terrible burden of your cruelty—had she not been nobler than you would ever give her credit for being?”

Montgomery was intensely agitated. His face rivaled in pallor the face resting upon his arm.

His eyes were growing wild with some great fear.

“For the love of God, tell me what you mean and what you know!” he cried. He gave her of the wine to drink, that she should retain her strength, little as it was. “If you have pity, tell me quickly. You must know how much it is to me.”

“You did not care how much it was to *her*!” she said, brokenly, the lids slowly drooping over her eyes, her lips scarce able to frame the words. “You were cruel to her, I tell you. You did not know what such an accusation is to a woman with her purity and spirit. She left your home two years ago. She went away in the night, that you should never guess where she was until she had gone too far for you to trace her. You did not try. You let her go, without one effort to bring her back, without even attempting to prove whether she were true or false. You would have broken her heart, but she would not let it break. She is as true and innocent and pure as the day you married her before the altar at St. James, and believed her the most marvelous among women.”

“How do *you* know of this?” murmured Montgomery, between his pallid lips.

“There was a time,” went on the faint, faltering voice, unheeding this interruption, “when you said you had found her untrue to you. You said you had seen her in company with another man, whom you did not know, among the trees of your home in Canada. You accused her of treachery to you, and demanded her explanation in a way that left her proud spirit nothing to do but remain silent and bear the wrong so laid upon her. You accused her furiously and were cruel—oh, you were cruel to her, and she was as pure as the baby in its cradle! You crushed her woman’s heart as though it were nothing to you!

“I can tell you no more. I have no voice left, and you could not hear me. The light—is the room so dark—so dark? Go to her, if you have an atom of your old manhood, and beg her forgiveness upon your knees; and if she will grant it, tell what I have said, and ask her to tell you who—he—was. She can tell you now. Tell her *I* am dead, and so is he. She can tell you

without harm to us. She must tell you, for her own sake."

The blood welled over the stiffening lips, and the half-closed eyes opened widely for an instant. Then a flickering smile stirred the lips fast dyeing with her life blood, and the heart that had suffered more than her words could tell, was at rest forever.

Montgomery laid her gently and tenderly back upon the pillows, an expression upon his face of intense bewilderment and suffering. The arrow that had wounded a woman's heart had entered into his own instead, and keener, sharper, more cruel than any stab from him.

Allan, half buried in his own thoughts of the revelation the woman had made regarding his mother and the girl he had but faintly remembered as being about her when he was but a scrap of a boy, yet felt instinctively that there was need of sympathy for the man before him who had grown suddenly so old and careworn.

"Montgomery, old fellow! Cheer up! What was she saying that could shake you like this? Come, come, my dear fellow, let me give you a restorative, as you have given her."

Montgomery shook his head and turned away.

“I must go to her at once!” he said, vaguely. “Where is she, Miss Hallston?”

“Marie?” Edith turned from the face of death to the face of the living, where the one had nothing but peace and the other was seamed with care. She went up to him and laid her hand softly upon his arm, her face very tender, her eyes wistful with unshed tears that had gathered. “You are going to her at last, Mr. Montgomery? You will be kind to her? She is so sweet and true and good that you must believe her. What should I have done, when mamma died, had she not come into my life like an angel! I saw her advertisement for such a position, and I could not have had a better. I loved her from the moment I saw her. I love her now just as deeply. You cannot be cruel to her any more!”

“You know, too, then?” he asked, hoarsely, the dazed expression still in his eyes. “Every one knows of her truth except myself—the man who should have shielded her from anything the world could have hurt her with.”

“No, I do not know,” said Edith, in her low, soft voice, as though she would not break the rest of the dead. “She would never tell me what was the sore wound in her heart, but I love her too well not to know that some great sorrow had touched her life. If you go to her, be kind to her, dear Mr. Montgomery.”

“Where is she?” he asked, half vacantly, turning to her as though for the comfort he could not find.

“I will find her,” said Allan, quietly. He seemed to have regained his calmness as soon as he saw the agitation upon his friends. “I will come back for you when I have found her—”

“No, no, I must go with you!” cried Montgomery, restlessly, his eyes darkening, the palor still upon his face. “I cannot wait for you to find her! I am the one to find her, Mansfield! I must go to her, if any one should—”

“Come, then,” said Allan, his calmness falling upon this excited man. “We must have this brave woman cared for, and see that there is no more than we would wish let out about this

dreadful affair. She would not wish it, and we must honor her."

"Yes, yes," said Montgomery, hurriedly. "We shall do all there is left for man to do for her, for what she has done for us. She is a wonderful woman."

Beautiful *Desdemona* had been carried to her room, and it was some time before any one was admitted save Edith and those who were caring for her. Edith was the first one upon whom she opened her eyes, and the wild light that shone in them softened when she knew who was bending so tenderly above her. Claspings her hands convulsively around Edith's neck as she knelt beside the bed, she burst into a flood of passionate tears—the first Edith had ever seen her shed.

"Oh, Edith, Edith, if you knew—if you knew!" she cried, her voice smothered against her friend's shoulder. "You have been always so sweet to me, and have shown me so clearly how much you love me—what will you say when you know the terrible truth? How can I tell you? How can I bring myself to tell you—"

"There, there, Marie dearest," whispered the

soft, soothing voice against her ear. "My poor, suffering Marie, never doubt that your Edith will love you always just the same. Tell me, if it will ease your heart, but never think for one moment that I would have you utter a word that would make the hurt worse. I love you too well to doubt you. Don't you know that I do?"

Marie lay very still for a moment, the light touch upon her hair, her passionate heart throbbing madly against the tender arm so lovingly encircling her. Then she commanded her voice, and spoke quite calmly.

"It is bitter to tell; but I must tell it, after—what happened—in there—to-night. I must tell you this, Edith, and then go once more where you—and he—can never find me. I cannot bear for you—and he—to look upon me when you have heard my disgrace. No, no; it is truly right that I tell it. Judge me as kindly as you have always judged me. That is all I ask—more than I can expect.

"When I was only three years old, my brother, the only other child in our family, who was almost six times my elder, quarreled with my father. Oh! it was a terrible quarrel, Edith!

Young as I was at the time, I still have a faint memory of it. The next day my brother did not come among us, and I was too fearful and shy to ask about him. No one told me where he had gone. No one ever spoke his name but once, when my mother whispered to me, when I was old enough to understand, and had asked for him, that I must never speak his name again in all my life. That he had brought some terrible disgrace upon us, and had quarreled with father, and had been sent out of our home, and must never return. That it was something so dreadful he had brought upon us that it would always darken my life, and it was for the best that I should be quite innocent of any knowledge of what it was.

“Of course, I was also old enough to have great curiosity about what my brother had done, and although I dared not disobey my mother, or ask afterward about him, yet I heard soon enough what he had done. It is impossible to keep disgrace away from those who must suffer for it. I learned soon enough, but it was outside of my home that the knowledge came to me. I went to school, of course—we had a

pretty old place out of Montreal—and was afterward sent to a convent to be finished. It was there that I learned to command my temper and my pride. The Sisters were so gentle and so calm always that I could not let my passionate heart wound them, as at first I did.

“It was there the knowledge came to me of my brother’s crime. One of my companions told me. She taunted me with it one day in a passion, and I made her tell me the whole truth. You cannot guess what it is, Edith. I shiver now when I think of it. My brother, who had been the idol of my father until that dreadful day, had committed forgery in the house he was looked upon as one of the most favored. They did not bring judgment against him out of kindness and pity for my father.

“He marred his life, Edith. He might have outlived this first crime, but he was too headstrong and had been spoiled in his home. Nothing was too bad for him to do. It was long before we found this out. It was not until two years ago that the truth was made known to me by himself. I had married, Edith. My husband was one of the most generous of men.

He was very wealthy, and nothing my heart could desire that money would purchase but I had.

“My husband had, of course, heard of this wild brother, but he never let the truth cast one shadow over our love or my happiness—until it was taken out of his hands. My brother himself came to me at my husband’s home one night. My husband had gone to the city, and I was in the woods beside the lawn. It was nearly dark, and I was waiting for him to come back. I was lonely, and could not rest. A man came to me out of this shadow. A man who at first frightened me, he was so rough and so hard with me. He caught me by my arm and held me close to him, while he whispered in my ear. *He* was my brother. He knew of my husband’s wealth, and demanded that I give him a share in it, that if I refused, he would get it whether or no. He knew how to get what he wanted, he said, coarsely, and laughed when I shrank away from him. Oh, it was dreadful, Edith, but I sent him away with some of my jewels. I dared not refuse him.

“My husband came upon us there. He did

not utter one word then, but went straight into the house, and when I would have gone to him to beg his pity, he would not open his door to me—to me, his wife! Not until the next day did he see me, and then he demanded of me who was my lover in such a manner—oh, Edith, Edith, you cannot guess the agony of it to me—and I could not explain. I came away the next night. I left his house without his knowing. I would have died rather than have let him know the truth, after that! But I shall tell him to-night,” she said, softly, after a moment. “I shall send for him and tell him, Edith, and then—then I shall go away from you all and hide, so that he will never find me, so that you may never see me again! I could not meet your eyes after you know all the truth, Edith—I could not live!”

A faint rap was heard at the door, and gently releasing herself from the clinging hands, Edith rose and opened it. Montgomery was outside. He was quite white but calm. He asked that he might see Mrs. Castlemon for but a moment. Edith would have sent him away, but Mrs. Castlemon, rising weakly to her feet, crossed to

her side and opened the door wider for his admittance.

“Come in,” she said, quietly. “I have something to say to you that must be said now!”

CHAPTER XXI.

AND AFTER—PEACE.

“I will detain you but one moment,” said Mrs. Castlemon, steadily, as Montgomery entered the room, his white face betraying some great storm of emotion. She held Edith’s hand almost unconsciously as she faced him in her beautiful pallor. “I have something to say, and it is best over. Afterward, you will go and I will never cross your path if it is in human power to have it so!” She was very quiet, but there was an excitement in her voice that told of her wonderful self-control.

“Two years ago, Arthur Montgomery, you insulted me in such a manner as to leave nothing for my womanhood but to leave your house then

and forever! You did not ask me as any true man should—especially of his wife—for an explanation. You demanded it in a way any true woman must resent. You were hard as a stone and bitterly cruel when you should have been most kind. How did you know what had fallen upon me? Why should you have judged it something evil in my life? Had you no more faith in me than that? I went away from you then, and never saw you again till the day you would have let us die before your eyes, and never so much as have lifted your hand to save us. You would, too, have let this beautiful, true woman die with me, because *I* was with her. I think you would have been glad to see me die so before your eyes. It was no fault of yours that this did not happen. Wait!"

She stopped him as he would have spoken, and kept him back as he started toward her, his face strangely moved. "I have not done. When I have I will be more generous than you, and let you clear yourself beyond the shadow of a doubt. I am the one wronged, and I have patience to bear much. You shall listen to me for this once. It is the least justice you can do me. Now I am

at liberty to free myself from your suspicion. I was forced to keep silent. Now the cause of my silence is removed.

“You know—you knew before you married me—that I had a brother who had cut himself from us—who was, so far as we knew, dead or worse. You knew of the crime he committed. There is little more to say. *He* was the man you charged me with having for a lover. *He* is the man you saw die before your eyes in the conservatory to-night. *He* is the man who has brought disgrace upon me in every way; but *you* are the man who should have defended me, and not falsely charged me with sin. You can go now, Arthur Montgomery. I have finished. We will never again meet on this earth. I can now go willingly, feeling that there can be no trace of wilful sin upon my own conscience or in your memory of the woman you wronged.”

He started forward, and caught her hands, in spite of her attempt to evade him. She drew herself up to her full height, and the pride and truth and beauty of her face burned down into his innermost soul. He drew her to him, in spite of her coldness and passion and scorn. He

pressed down upon his shoulder the dark head, with its exquisite hair streaming over his arm nearly to the floor. He laid his own face down upon hers and sobbed as it is terrible to hear in a man. Edith had turned away, and left them, so softly they never knew of it.

“Marie, Marie!” whispered Arthur Montgomery, by and by, the sobs still in his voice, a remorse so great upon his face, the sweet black eyes lifted to his could not long hold their scorn. “Marie! Listen to me, do—for God’s sake listen to me! I have wronged you! I should be ashamed ever to look into your innocent face again, but that I shall plead so for your forgiveness you cannot withhold it from me! Ah, if you could know how I love you! If you could know what I have suffered since you left me—since I drove you from our home! Marie! Marie! The woman who died to-night—the wife of the man we saw shoot himself—told me of this wrong I have done you—you, the sweetest, truest, noblest of women! I cannot let you go—I will not let you go until you have told me of your forgiveness—until you have said, for the memory of our old love and trust and happiness,

you will forgive me this wrong done you out of mad jealousy that made a brute of me; that you forgive me and will come back to me! I will devote my life to making you happy. I will never let one harsh word mar your peace, if you will but come back to me—to me, Marie, my wife!”

She was trembling in his arms. She could not get away from his embrace nor utterly hide her face from his eyes, try as she would, against his shoulder. She shivered and stood quite still, with his arms fiercely around her and his face against her hair. Then the hard words of reproach faltered and died in a burst of tears upon his shoulder.

* * * * *

So peace came from the strange mystery that had so long shrouded two lives. So, the peace of the grave hid the broken heart of one woman, while life's new hope filled the heart of her sister woman in her husband's beautiful home, where never any more was there sorrow for her save in memory of what had been.

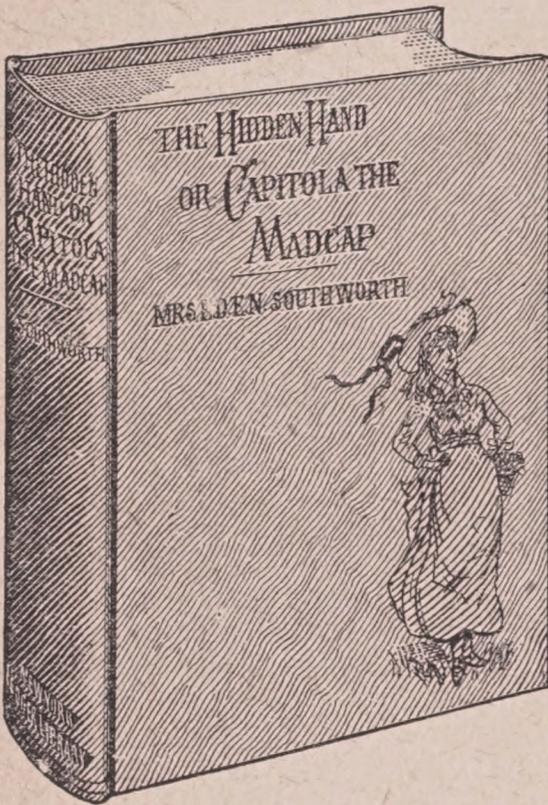
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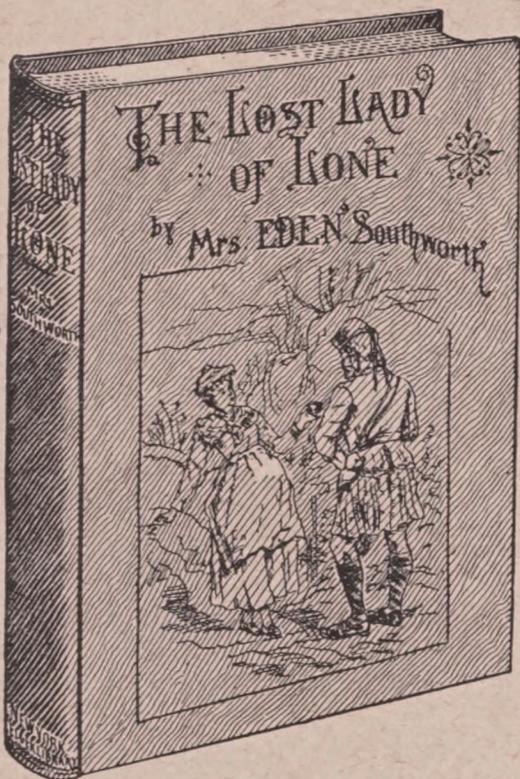
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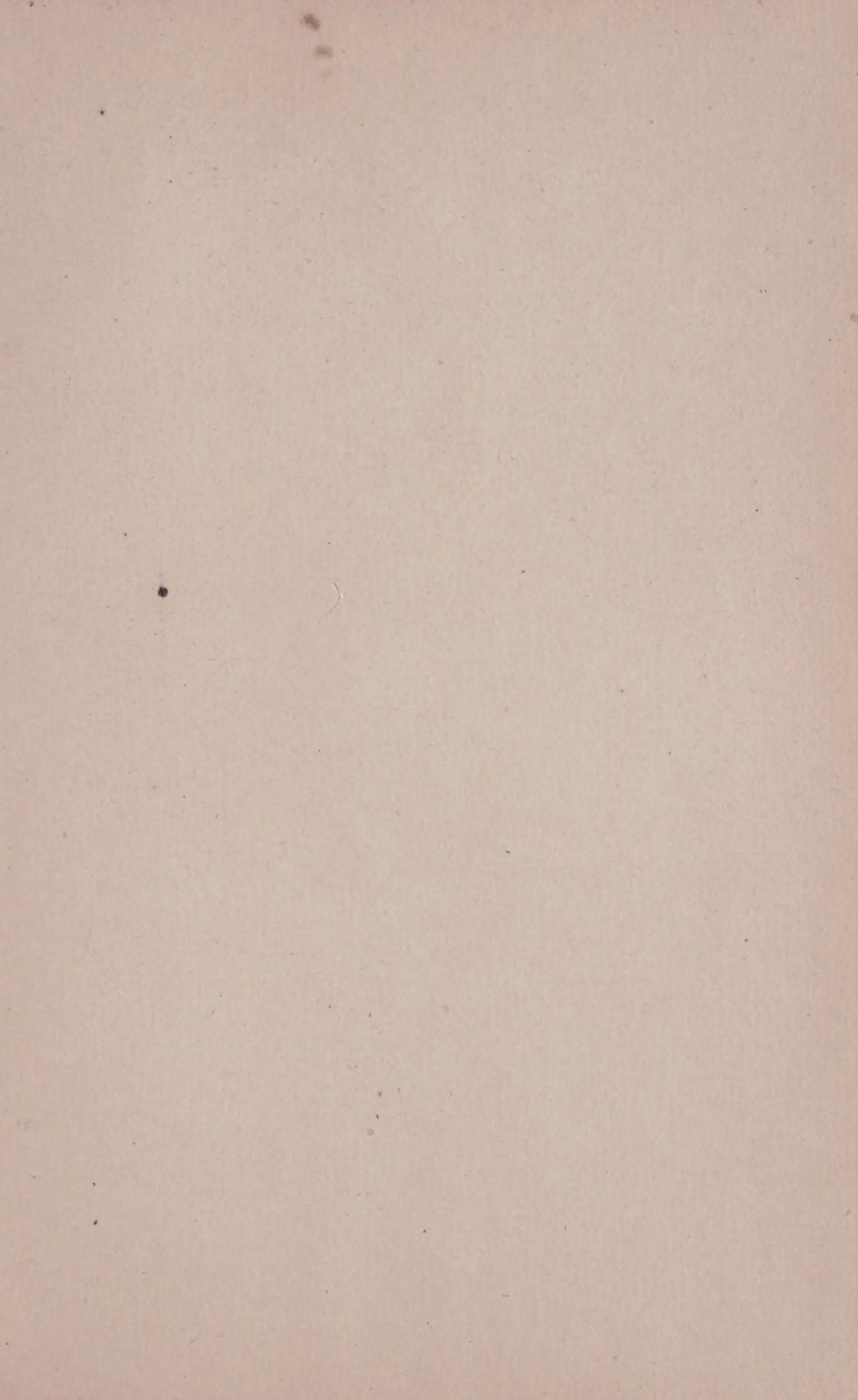
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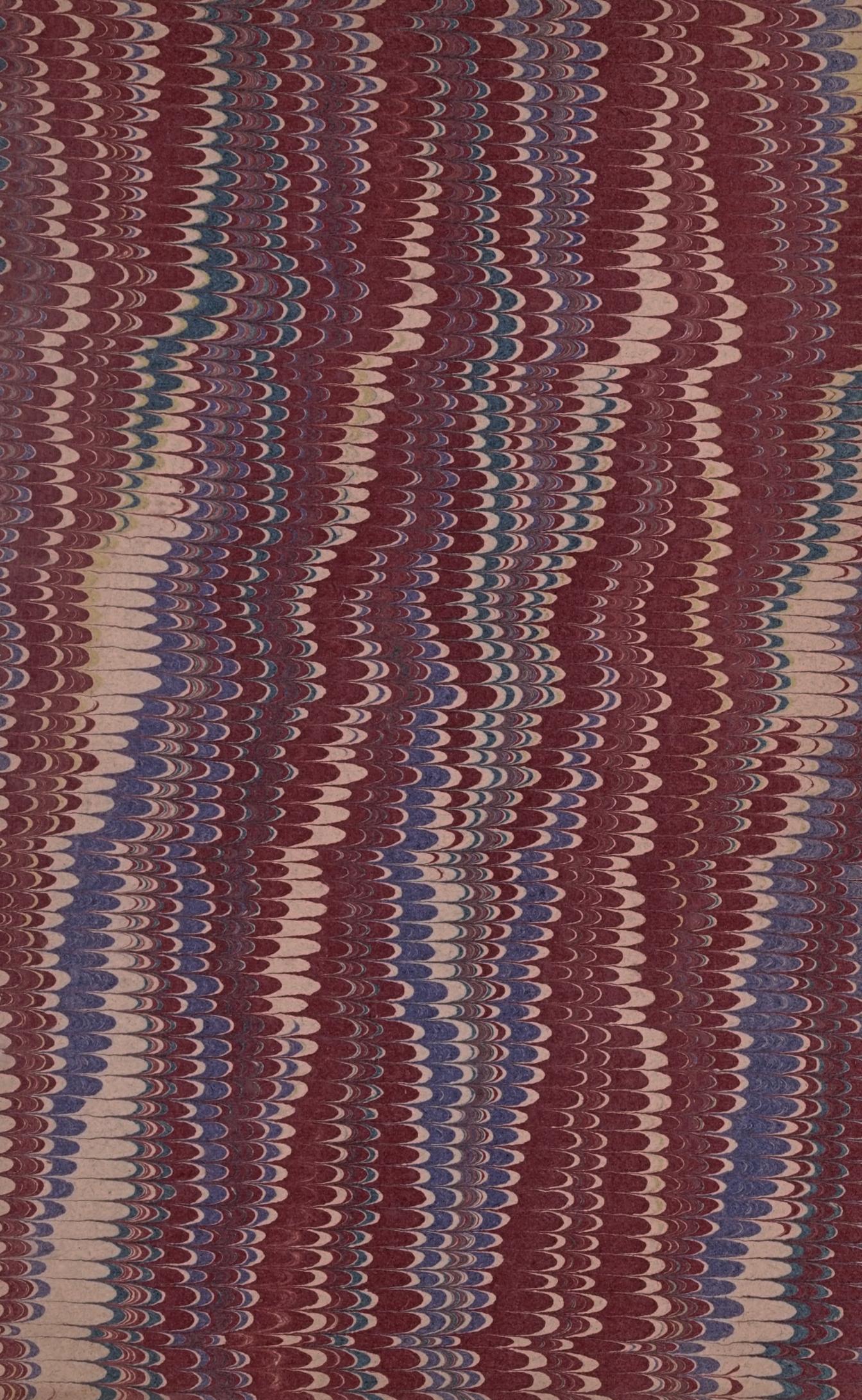
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