ALEX. MCVEIGH MILLER

GUY KENMORE'S WIFE, AND THE ROSE AND THE LILY

Alex. McVeigh Miller

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Guy Kenmore's Wife, and The Rose and the Lily:

Содержание

Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller
Guy Kenmore's Wife, and
The Rose and the Lily

GUY KENMORE'S WIFE;
OR,
HER MOTHER'S SECRET

CHAPTER I

"The moonlight lay on the garden wall,
And bathed each path in a silver glow;
And over the towers of the grey hall
Its pearly banner was trailing low."

It was a night of nights. Moonlight—the silvery, mystical, entrancing, love-breathing, moonlight of exquisite June—fairest daughter of the year—lay over all the land. The bay—our own beautiful Chesapeake—shone gloriously in the resplendent light, and rolled its foam-capped, phosphorescent waves proudly on to

the grand Atlantic.

"Ten thousand stars were in the sky,
Ten thousand in the sea.

"For every wave with dimpled crest
That leaped upon the air,
Had caught a star in its embrace,
And held it trembling there!"

A wind from the sea—cool, and salty, and delicious—came up to Bay View House, and stole in with the moonlight to the lace-draped windows of the parlor where a crumpled little figure crouched in a forlorn white heap on the wide, old-fashioned window sill, sobbing desperately through the plump little hands, in which the girlish face was hidden.

The spacious parlor with its handsome, old-fashioned furniture, and open piano, was deserted, and the weeping of the girl echoed forlornly through the room, and blended strangely with the whispers of the wind, and the sounds of the sea.

Old Faith put her grotesque, white-capped head inside the parlor door.

"Miss Irene, darling, won't you come and take your tea now?" said she, persuasively. "There's strawberry short-cake, and the reddest strawberries, and yellowest cream," added she, artfully appealing to the young lady's well-known epicurean tastes.

A sharp little voice answered back from the window seat:

"I won't take a thing, Faith; I mean to starve myself to death!"

"Oh, fie, my dearie, don't, now," cried Faith. "Come up-stairs, and let me tuck you in your little white bed, there's a love!"

"I won't, so there! Go away and leave me alone, Faith," cried the girl, through her stifled, hysterical sobs.

Exit Faith.

The wind stirred the yellow curls on the drooping head, and the moonlight touched them with fingers of light, bringing out their glints of gold. The great magnolia tree outside the window shook a gust of strong, sweet perfume from the large white waxen flowers, and the scent of June roses and lilacs came up from the old-fashioned garden. But the sweetness and beauty of the night seemed lost on little Irene, for her grieved sobs only burst forth afresh when Faith had departed. The girlish bosom heaved, the tears rained through her fingers, her smothered wail disturbed the harmony of the beautiful night.

Another step came along the hall, a hand turned the door-knob and a handsome old man came into the room.

"Irene, my pet, my darling, where are you hiding? Come to papa," he called, glancing around the dimly-lighted room.

With a scream of joy the little figure sprang down from its high perch in the window, and ran precipitately into his arms.

"Oh, papa, dear papa, you are home again!" she exclaimed, laughing and crying together, and patting his grey whiskers with her loving white hands.

"Yes, but you aren't glad to see me one bit. You're crying

because I've come home. Shall I go back to the city, eh?" he inquired, softly pinching her cheek, and looking at her with kind, blue eyes full of love.

Irene hid her lovely face on his broad breast and sobbed aloud.

"Why, what ails my little girl?" he exclaimed. "Who's been teasing my pet? Where are mamma and the girls?"

With a fresh rain of tears, Irene sobbed out:

"All g—gone to the b—ball, and would not let—let—me g—go, after you'd told them all I might, papa."

The old man's genial face clouded over instantly with some intangible annoyance.

"Why wouldn't they let you go?" he inquired.

"Bertha said if I went, *she* wouldn't," replied Irene, hushing her sobs, and answering in a high-pitched, indignant young voice; "she said children had no business at a ball! The idea of calling *me* a child! I was *sixteen*, yesterday! Oh, papa, have you brought me a birthday present from the city?" she inquired, eagerly, forgetting for a moment her grievance.

"Yes, dear. And so Bertha wouldn't let you go to the ball?" he said, taking a seat, and drawing her down upon his knee.

"It was mamma, too. *She* took Bertha's part, and said I shouldn't come out until the girls were married. Two Miss Brookes were quite enough in the market at one time she said. As if I wanted to marry any of their ridiculous beauxs, with their lisps, and their eye-glasses, and their black coats. I despise them!" cried Irene, indignantly.

"That's because, as Bertha said, you're nothing but a child," laughed Mr. Brooke. "When you grow older you'll quite adore these black-coated dandies, I dare say;" then he added, in a graver tone: "Did Elaine forbid your going, too?"

"No, she didn't say one word for, or against it. She only pursed up her lips and looked out of the window. I never saw such a coward as Elaine," pursued the girl, angrily. "Bertha and mamma have everything their own way, and ride rough-shod over Elaine, and she daren't say her soul's her own!"

"Hush, Irene—you musn't talk so disrespectfully of your—sister," her father said, reprovingly.

"Well, but, papa, do you think it is right for Ellie to be ruled so by Bertha? She's older than Bert, you know," said the girl, laying her soft, round cheek against his, coaxingly.

A strange, sad look came into Mr. Brooke's face at her words.

"My dear, we won't discuss it," he said, uneasily. "Elaine is so gentle and quiet, she will not take her own part, perhaps. But about this ball, my pet. I'm sorry they wouldn't let you go. I brought you some pretty fal-lals to wear."

He handed her several parcels as he spoke, and turned up the lamps to a brighter blaze. Irene Brooke began unwrapping the parcels, with little feminine shrieks of delight.

"A baby-blue sash; oh, oh, you dear, old darling!" she cried, letting the rich lengths of wide, blue satin ribbon ripple splendidly over her white dress. "A fan! Ivory sticks, and blue and white feathers! Oh, thank you a hundred times, papa! And

what is this tiny parcel? Oh, a bang-net! You ridiculous old papa, what do you think I want of a bang-net?" with a ripple of girlish laughter.

"The shop-woman recommended it. She said they were very fashionable," said Mr. Brooke, vaguely.

"I don't care! I'll never put *my* yellow curls under a bang-net," laughed Irene, whose tears were dried now as if they had never been. "Ellie may have it. And, oh, this little box! I had almost missed it."

She opened it with a little girlish shriek of joy and amaze.

"A gold chain and locket! Oh, papa, let me kiss you a hundred times!" she cried, running to him and half smothering him with energetic caresses.

"Your birthday present, my love. Look in the locket and see if you like the pictures," said Mr. Brooke as soon as he could get his breath.

She left off choking him a moment to obey.

"Your picture and Elaine's—the very ones I would have wished for! And how true, how perfect, how beautiful!" she cried, kissing the pictured faces. "Dear papa, how did you know that I would far rather have your picture and Ellie's than mamma's and Bert's?" she inquired, smiling fondly at him.

"I knew you liked us best because we spoil you the most," he replied.

"That is true of you, papa, but not to my elder sister," replied Irene, with a touch of seriousness softening for the moment her

childish face. "Ellie is very kind to me, but she never spoils me. She reads me long lectures in private, and I believe she loves me dearly, but she never takes my part against mamma and Bert, when they scold and fret me. She only looks tearful and miserable! Oh, why should she be afraid of them?"

"Hush, Irene, I will not listen to such ridiculous fancies," said Mr. Brooke, half sternly. "You must not imbibe such foolish notions! and, remember, I forbid you, on pain of my extreme displeasure, ever to mention these idle notions to your sister."

"Indeed I never will, papa, I would not hurt Ellie's feelings for the world," the girl said, earnestly. Then she went to his side and put her arm around his neck.

"Papa," she said, looking up at him, with arch, beautiful eyes that sparkled like purple-blue pansies under their shady, golden-brown lashes, "papa, it isn't an hour yet since they went to the ball."

"Well?" he said, half-comprehendingly, smiling down into the eager, charming face, and passing his hand caressingly over the wealth of golden curls that adorned the dainty head.

"Let us go to the ball—you and I, papa?" she said, audaciously.

"What? Why, that would be rank rebellion! What would mamma and the girls say when we sneaked into the ball-room? Wouldn't they march us home and put us in irons for disobeying orders?" inquired Mr. Brooke in pretended alarm, though Irene did not lose the humorous twinkle in his eye.

"No, sir, you know they won't say a word if you take my part!

You know they never do. They're afraid of my dear old papa. Oh, how amazed and how angry they would be if you and I were to walk in presently, and have a dance together! And serve them right, too, for their selfishness! Oh, papa, dearest, *do* take me! I never, never saw a ball in my life, and I had so set my heart on this one!"

The tearful eyes and coaxing lips conquered the old man's heart as they always did, against his better judgment.

"Well, well, they didn't treat you right," he said, "and you shall have your revenge on them. Go along now, and tell old Faith to put your new white frock and blue sash on you in fifteen minutes while I am getting ready."

CHAPTER II

Every lady knows that fifteen minutes is a totally inadequate time in which to make a ball toilet. It was at least half an hour before Irene, with the assistance of the old housekeeper, had adorned herself with all the finery at her command. Then she came flying down the steps in joyous haste, and burst into the parlor with the refrain of a happy song upon her girlish lips.

Old Faith followed more leisurely with a little white nubia and shawl thrown over her arm.

"Ah! dearie me, dearie me," she sighed, as she waddled uncomfortably down the wide stairs, "the child's too pretty and too willful, and Mr. Brooke spoils her too much! Harm will come of it, I fear me. Poor Miss Ellie, poor Irene!"

She laid the wrappings of her young mistress across the hat-rack in the hall ready for her, and went back to her own domain and her own duties. Meanwhile Irene had danced blithely into the parlor.

"Papa," she said, to the dark, masculine figure that stood at the window with its back to her, "I'm ready now. Don't I look nice?"

The figure turned around from its contemplation of the moonlighted bay, and looked at her. It was not Mr. Brooke at all. It was a younger, handsomer man, whose brown eyes danced with irresistible mirth at her pardonable vanity.

"Nice enough to eat," he answered coolly, and Irene gave a

little, startled shriek.

"Oh, dear, it isn't papa at all. Are you a bear, sir, that you talk of eating me?" she inquired, demurely.

The stranger came forward into the light, and stood before her.

"Do I look like one?" he inquired, with a smile that lit up his face indescribably.

Then, for a moment, they stared straight at each other, taking a mental inventory of each other's appearance.

Ladies first—so we will try to give you some faint idea of how Irene Brooke appeared in Guy Kenmore's eyes, though it is no easy task, for beauty like hers, varying from light to shadow with

> "Sudden glances, sweet and strange,
> Delicious spites and darling angers,
> And airy forms of flitting change,"

defies all formal attempts at description.

She was a sixteen-year-old girl, with the graceful slenderness of that exquisite age, and the warm, blonde beauty of the south. Her eyes were deeply, darkly, beautifully blue, and appeared almost black beneath the long, thick fringes of the beautiful, golden-brown lashes, and the slender, arched brows of a darker hue. These arched brows, and the faint, very faint, *retrousse* inclination of the pretty little nose, gave an air of piquancy and spirit to the young face that was hightened by the proud curve of the short upper lip. The round, dimpled chin, and soft cheeks were tinted with the soft pink of the sea shell. The waving,

rippling mass of glorious curls was of that warm, rich, golden hue the old masters loved to paint. Put on such a fair young girl a dress of soft white muslin and lace—just short enough to show the tiny, high-arched feet in white kid slippers—girdle the slim waist with a broad, blue ribbon, and fancy to yourself, reader mine, how sweet a vision she appeared in the eyes of the stranger.

For him, he was tall, large, and graceful, with a certain air of indolence and gracious ease, not to say laziness. He was decidedly handsome, with a well-shaped head of closely-clipped brown hair, good features, laughing brown eyes, and a drooping brown mustache. His summer suit of soft, light-gray cloth was infinitely becoming.

But in much less time than it took for these cursory descriptions, Irene has spoken:

"No, you do not look like a bear," she says, with charming frankness. "You look like—see how good I am at guessing—like Bertha's city beau! You are—*aren't* you?"

Something in this childish frankness touches him with faint annoyance. He chews the end of his long mustache after an old habit, and answers, rather stiffly:

"My name is–"

"'Norval, from the Grampian hills,'" she quotes, with audacious laughter.

"No,—it is plain Guy Kenmore," he answers, stifling his rising vexation, and laughing with her.

"There, didn't I say so? Pray sit down, Mr. Kenmore,"

sweeping him a mocking, ridiculous little courtesy. "I hope you will make yourself quite at home at Bay View. I have a great liking for you, Mr. Kenmore."

He takes a chair with readiness, while she paces, a little restlessly, up and down the floor.

"Thank you," he says, languidly. "May I inquire to what circumstances I owe the honor of your regard?"

"You may," shooting him a swift, arch glance. "You're going to take Bert off our hands, and I consider you in the light of my greatest benefactor."

He laughs and colors at the cool speech of this strange girl.

"Indeed?" he says, with a peculiar accent on the word. "Why?"

"Oh, because," she pauses in her restless walk, and looks gravely at him a moment with those dark blue eyes, "because Bert is so wretchedly selfish she won't let me go anywhere until *she* is married off. Now to-night there was a ball. Papa had said I might go, but when he was called unexpectedly away to the city what did Bert and mamma do but forbid my going! After my dress and gloves and slippers were all bought, too. Wasn't that too bad? And if you were me shouldn't you just love the man that would take Bertha away?"

"A spoiled child, who hasn't the least business out of the school-room yet," mentally decides the visitor. Aloud he says, curiously:

"Do you know you have the advantage of me? I haven't the least idea who you are."

The blue eyes grow very large and round indeed. "Haven't you, really? Did Bertha never tell you about me—her little sister, Irene?"

"Never. She must have forgotten your existence," he answered, with an amused twinkle in his eyes.

"It is like her selfishness!" flashed Irene. "Never mind, I'll pay her out for her crossness this evening. Only think, Mr. Kenmore, papa came home just after they had gone, and said *he* would take me to the ball. I wonder if he is ready yet. It's quite time we were starting," she adds, looking anxiously at the door.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Brooke. Your dazzling *entree* put everything out of my mind for a moment. Your father was in here about fifteen minutes ago. He left a message for you."

"Why didn't you tell me, ah, why didn't you?" she demands, stamping her little foot in impatient wrath.

"You talked so fast I quite forgot," he answers coolly.

"Well, are you going to tell me now?" she inquires, flashing her large eyes at him superbly.

"Yes, if you will keep still long enough," he answers, provokingly, and openly amused at the impatient anger, so like that of a sadly spoiled child.

Irene folds her bare white arms over her heaving breast, and shuts her red lips tightly over her busy little tongue; but her eyes look through him with a glance that says plainer than words:

"Go on, now, I'm waiting."

With a stifled laugh, he obeys:

"Mr. Brooke said that he had been most unexpectedly called away on a little matter of business, but that he would certainly return inside an hour and take you to the ball."

He expected some expression of disappointment, but he was scarcely prepared for the dire effect of his communication.

Irene ran precipitately to the darkest corner of the room, flung herself down on a sofa, and dissolved into tears.

Feminine tears are an abomination to most men. Our hero is no exception to the rule. He fidgets uneasily in his chair a moment, then rises and goes over to the window, and listening to the low, sad murmur of the sea tries to lose the sound of that disconsolate sobbing over there in the dark corner.

"I never saw such a great, spoiled baby in my life," he says, vexedly, to himself. "How childish, how silly! She's as pretty as a doll, and that's all there is to her!"

But he cannot shut out easily the sound of her childish weeping. It haunts and vexes him.

"Oh, I say, Miss Brooke," he says, going over to her at last, "I wouldn't cry if I were in your place. Your father will be back directly."

Irene, lifting her head, looks at him with tearful blue eyes shining under the tangle of golden love-locks that half obscures her round, white forehead.

"No, he will not," she answers, stifling her sobs. "When men go out on business they never come back for hours and hours —*and hours*!" dolefully. "It was too bad of papa to treat me so!"

"But he was *called* away—don't you understand that? He wouldn't have gone of himself," says Mr. Kenmore, doing valiant battle for his fellow-man.

"I don't care. He shouldn't have gone after he'd promised me, and I was all ready," Irene answers, obstinately and with a fresh sob.

"Little goosie!" the young man mutters between his teeth, and feeling a strong desire to shake the unreasonable child.

But suddenly she springs up, dashing the tears from her eyes.

"I won't *wait* for papa, so there!" she flashes out, determinedly. "All the best dances will be over if we go so late. *You* shall take me."

"*I'm* not invited, you know," he says, blankly.

"No matter. They'll make you welcome, for Bert's sake. Any friend of Miss Bertha's, you know, etc.," she says, with a little, malicious laugh. "Yes, you shall go with me. It is a splendid idea. I wonder you didn't suggest it yourself."

He smiles grimly.

"Indeed, Miss Brooke, I'm not at all in ball costume," he objects, glancing down at his neat, light suit.

"All the better. I despise their ugly black coats," she replies, warmly. "Do you know," with startling candor, "you are handsomer and nicer-looking than any of the black-coated dandies that dawdle around Ellie and Bert? Come, you *will* go, just to please me, won't you?" she implores, pathetically.

"No gentleman ever refuses a lady's request," he replies, with

rather a sulky air.

Irene scarcely notices his sulky tone. Her heart is set on this daring escapade. Smarting under the sense of the injuries sustained at Bertha's hands, she longs to avenge herself, and show her selfish sister that she will go her way despite her objections. It is a child's spite, a child's willfulness, and all the more obstinate for that reason.

"Oh, thank you," she says, brightly. "We shall have a charming time, sha'n't we?"

"You may. I am not rapturous over the prospect," he replies, laconically.

The willful girl regards him with sincere amazement. "Why, you must be very stupid indeed, not to care for a ball," she observes, with all the candor and freshness of an *enfant terrible*.

"You are very candid," he replies, feeling a strong desire to seize his hat and leave the house.

"Now you are vexed with me. What have I done?" she inquires, fixing on him the innocent gaze of her large, soft eyes. "I hope you haven't a bad temper," she goes on, earnestly, almost confidingly, "for Bert isn't an angel, I can assure you; and if you're both cross, won't you have a lovely time when you marry."

Vexation at this aggravating little beauty almost gets the better of the young man's politeness.

"Miss Brooke, if you weren't such a pretty child, I should like to shake you soundly, and send you off to your little bed!" he exclaims.

She flushes crimson, flashes him an angry glance from her lovely eyes, and curls her red lips into a decided and deliberate *moue* at him. Then, holding her pretty head high, she walks from the room.

"Has she taken me at my word?" he asks himself, rather blankly.

But no; Irene has only gone to the housekeeper's room, to leave a message for her father that she has gone to the ball with Mr. Kenmore. It does not enter her girlish mind that she is doing an improper thing, or that her father would object to it.

Old Faith, wiser in this world's lore than her willful little mistress, raises vehement objections.

"You mustn't do no such thing, Miss Irene, darling," she says. "Miss Bertha will be downright outrageous about you coming there along of her beau."

The pansy-blue eyes flash, the red lips pout mutinously.

"All the better," she answers, wickedly. "I want to make her mad! That's why I'm going! I'm going to the ball with her beau; and I mean to keep him all to myself, and to flirt with him outrageously, just to see how Bert's black eyes will snap!"

CHAPTER III

"Oh, Irene, my darling, why have you done this mad, disobedient thing? Mamma and Bertha are terribly angry! When Bertha first saw you, dancing with her lover, too, I thought she would have fainted. Her eyes flashed lightning. I believe she could have killed you! Child, child, you will break my heart by your willfulness! Oh, you cannot dream what this may bring upon you!"

The sweet voice broke in almost a wail of pain, and beautiful Elaine Brooke drew her sister further into the shaded alcove of the bay-window as she waited anxiously to hear her reply.

Pretty little Irene shrugged her dimpled white shoulders, and pouted her rosy lips.

"Now, Ellie, you needn't begin to scold," she said. "You know you all treated me unfairly, and so papa said when he came home!"

"Papa *has* come, then?" asked Miss Brooke, in a tone of relief.

"Yes, and he gave me leave to come, so you needn't lecture any more, Ellie," said the girl, with an arch, pleading glance.

But a long and bitter sigh drifted over the grave, sweet lips of Elaine Brooke.

"Then why, ah, why *didn't* papa bring you himself?" she said, wringing her slender white hands together. "He should have known that Bertha would be enraged at your coming with Mr.

Kenmore."

"Don't scold any more, Ellie, *please* don't," said her little sister, impatiently; "papa *was* coming, but, while I was up-stairs dressing, he was called away for an hour. So when I came down to the parlor there was Mr. Kenmore, and I made him go with me. Please let me go now. I want to dance some more."

"Oh, Irene, indeed you must not dance again to-night! Promise me you will not!" exclaimed her sister, anxiously.

Irene shook the white hand off her shoulder, dismayed and rebellious.

"I'm engaged to Mr. Kenmore for ever so many dances," she exclaimed, "and I don't want to break my word! You're selfish, Ellie, and want to have all the pleasure to yourself!"

"Selfish," Elaine echoed, with almost a moan. "Oh, child, you don't understand!" then she added, almost piteously: "Irene, in the large parlor next to the dancing-room there are some young people like yourself who are not dancing at all, but playing games and having charades and tableaux. Darling, won't you join them, and keep out of Bert's and mamma's sight? Perhaps they won't be so angry, then."

"I'm not afraid of them–" Irene began, rebelliously, but stopped short as she saw a glittering tear splash down on her sister's cheek. "Oh, Ellie, you great baby," she said, "must I give up all my pleasure just to please you?"

"Yes, for this once, love," answered Elaine, tremblingly. "I'll try to make it up to you, indeed I will, some other time, dear,"

and drawing Irene further into the shadow of the lace curtain, she bent down and kissed the fresh young lips.

"But here comes Mr. Kenmore, now. What shall I say to him about our dances?" asked the girl, with a sigh of disappointment.

"Oh, I'll make your excuses," Elaine answered, readily, as Mr. Kenmore came toward them, not looking very eager, certainly, over the dances he was fated to lose.

His handsome brown eyes lighted with admiration as they fell upon Elaine Brooke, and she was well worthy of it, for in her maturer style she was as lovely as the girlish Irene.

The family Bible registered the eldest Miss Brooke as thirty-two years old, and she had all the repose and dignity of the age, with all the charms of ripe loveliness. Men called her a "magnificent woman," envious girls sneeringly dubbed her an old maid. This latter was her own fault, certainly, for she had admirers by the score who went wild over her rare blonde beauty. But Miss Brooke, unknown to all, treasured a broken dream in her heart like her hapless namesake:

> "Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable;
> Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat."

So the years went and came, and Elaine answered no to all her suitors, though her mother frowned and her father sighed, while deep down in her heart she echoed the "Lily Maid's" song:

> "Sweet is true love, though given in vain, in vain,

And sweet is death who puts an end to pain."

But none of this pain was visible on Elaine's face as she looked up at Guy Kenmore with that calm, sweet smile, softly bright, like the moonlight that shone on the outer world.

"Mr. Kenmore, I know you will excuse Irene from her dances," she said sweetly. "She wants to go and play games with the other children in the parlor."

"*The other children*," Irene muttered ominously, and before Mr. Kenmore could murmur his ready assent, she exclaimed, in a tone of witching *diablerie*:

"Yes, but I'm not going to desert my partner! Come along, Mr. Kenmore, and you shall be my play-fellow with the children."

With a gay little laugh and a triumphant glance at her sister, Irene slipped her hand in his arm, and led her captive away, leaving Elaine gazing after them in silent dismay and despair. Irene had outwitted her after all, and her artful scheme for keeping her apart from Bertha's lover was an ignominious failure.

With a sinking heart and a face as pale as death, she turned away to convey the tidings of her failure to her mother.

Mrs. Brooke, a still handsome woman of the brunette type, received the news with an ominous flash of her large black eyes.

"Little minx! she shall pay for it, dearly," she muttered, between her teeth.

"Oh, mamma, it is only thoughtlessness I think. She doesn't really mean to be disobedient," faltered Elaine, tremulously.

Her mother gave her a swift, displeased glance that silenced the excusing words on her lips.

Bertha came up, flushed from the dance, a dark, haughty beauty, three years younger than Elaine, but never owning to more than twenty years.

"Where is Mr. Kenmore? I left him with you, mamma," she said.

"He left me to seek his partner for the next dance," Mrs. Brooke answered, in a tone of repressed fury.

Bertha turned her large, flashing dark eyes on her elder sister.

"I thought mamma sent you to get Irene out of the way," she said, imperiously.

"I did my best, Bertha," Elaine answered, gently. "I persuaded her to go and play games in the parlor. Unfortunately Mr. Kenmore came up as she was going, and she playfully carried him off with her. I am sure he will return to us directly. He regards Irene as the merest child."

"She is as old as you were when she was–" Bertha sneered in her sister's ear, making the last word so low it was inaudible.

Beautiful Elaine's cool, white cheeks crimsoned, then grew paler than before. She answered not a word.

"Hush, Bertha. Are you crazy, making such remarks in this crowded room?" whispered her mother, in angry haste.

"I shall not be answerable for what I say or do unless you get my lover away from that wretched girl," the dark-eyed beauty retorted furiously in her ear.

"Come, then, let us go and see their games," Mrs. Brooke answered, soothingly, to allay the young lady's violent rage. "He will leave Irene and come to you as soon as he sees you."

The three moved away to the crowded parlor where the girls from twelve to sixteen, and the lads from sixteen to twenty, were enjoying themselves, to the top of their bent. Having exhausted everything else, they had determined on having a wedding. Mr. Kenmore being the most grown-up of the gentlemen, was selected for the groom, and Irene Brooke for the bride.

CHAPTER IV

Mr. Kenmore, having vainly protested at first against making a show of himself, has now resigned himself to his fate, and stands awaiting his martyrdom with a rather bored look on his handsome face. Irene, on the point of a vehement refusal to enact the bride's part, suddenly catches a glimpse of Bertha's face glowering on her from the door, and on the instant her mood changes.

Never so willing a bride as she.

After that one glance she does not seem to see Bertha. She stands with lowered eyelids waiting while the gay young girls fasten a square of tulle on her hair with a spray of real orange blossoms from the pet orange tree that is the pride of the hostess. No one sees the mischief dancing under the demurely drooping lashes.

"Poor old Bert—how mad she is," the girl is saying to herself. "I think I've almost paid her out now for her meanness. As soon as the wedding is over she shall have her fine beau back. I believe I have almost teased her enough."

"Who will be the preacher?" she inquires, glancing around at the lads.

"Mr. Clavering, Mr. Clavering!" cried half a dozen voices. "He looks the parson to the life, with his black coat and little white tie. There he is on the balcony. Go and ask him, Mr.

Kenmore."

Guy Kenmore steps lazily through the low window and addresses the little, clerical-looking figure standing meditatively in the moonlight.

"Excuse me," he says, in his bored tone. "We are going to have a marriage, by way of a diversion for the young people. Will you come in and perform the ceremony for us?"

Mr. Clavering turns a pale, dreamy, rather delicate face, toward the speaker.

"Isn't it rather sudden?" he inquires.

"Rather," Mr. Kenmore asserts, with a careless laugh, and without more words they step through the window into the parlor, where the babel of shrill young voices goes on without cessation.

The bride, and a giggling string of attendants, are already on the floor awaiting them. Guy Kenmore laughingly steps to his place. Somebody puts a prayer-book into Mr. Clavering's hand and merrily introduces him to the bride and groom. He bows, and, with quite an assumption of gravity, opens the book and begins to read the beautiful marriage service.

To Bertha Brooke, glaring with scarce repressed rage at the mock marriage, it all seems horribly real. Irene has put on a shy, frightened look, supposed to be natural to brides, and no one takes note of the suppressed merriment dancing in her blue eyes, as she pictures to herself Bertha's silent rage. Mr. Kenmore, impressed beyond his will by the solemn marriage words, looks a little graver than his wont. The babel of voices is momentarily

still, while bright eyes gaze entranced on the beautiful scene. It seems to Bertha as if she can no longer bear it; as if she must scream out aloud as she hears Guy Kenmore's deep, full voice repeating after Mr. Clavering:

"I, Guy, take thee, Irene, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth."

"Mamma, for God's sake, stop it," Bertha utters, in a fierce whisper, clutching her mother's arm.

"Don't be a fool, Bertha! It is nothing but child's play," Mrs. Brooke replies, impatiently, and, in a minute more the ring is slipped over Irene's finger, and the minister utters, in tones that sound too solemn for this pretty mockery:

"Whom God had joined together, let no man put asunder."

Gay congratulations followed, and Irene, a little paler than her wont, slipped over to Elaine, who was white as death, with the dew of unshed tears glittering on her long, thick lashes.

"You dear old owl, how solemn you look," she said. "But I didn't like it myself. It sounded too horribly real. Once I had half a mind to break loose, and run away!"

Mrs. Brooke glared at her youngest pride in silent rage. The vials of her wrath were reserved till to-morrow.

Irene darted to Mr. Kenmore's side and looked at him with laughing eyes:

"You may go and stay with Bert now," she said, carelessly, "I believe I have teased her quite enough, and I mean to be good the remainder of the night."

He looked at the bright, arch face curiously a minute, then moved away to join Bertha.

She received him with a curling lip, and an irrepressible flash of her proud, dark eyes.

"I did not know you were so fond of juvenile society, Mr. Kenmore," she said, in a tone of pique.

"I am not; I was rather forced into this affair, Miss Bertha," he replied, languidly, and with a rather bored expression. "But come, let us promenade the balcony in the moonlight. Or would you prefer to dance?"

"The balcony by all means," answered Bertha, remembering what an opportunity it would afford for a sentimental *tete-a-tete*, and also that a pretty woman never looks more lovely than by moonlight.

"When did you leave Baltimore?" she inquired, as they stepped through the low French window, and walked arm-in-arm along the moonlighted balcony.

"Only to-day," he answered. "I remembered my promise to visit you at Bay View, and thought it a good time to keep my word, not dreaming that you would be absent. I half-feared you would have forgotten me, it has been so long since your visit to

the city," he added, half-quizzically, for Irene's innocent prattle that evening had let in some light upon his mind. He understood that Bertha claimed him openly as her lover, and fully calculated on marrying him, while the truth was that though he had a lazy admiration for the beautiful brunette, he had never dreamed of aspiring for her hand. His intimate friends did not consider him "a marrying man."

"As if I could ever forget my visit to Baltimore," said Bertha, sentimentally, with an effective upward glance into his face from her dark, long-lashed eyes.

Mr. Kenmore returned the coquettish glance with interest. He was an adept at flirting himself when he could conquer his natural indolence enough to exercise the art.

"I hope it will not be long before you visit the city again," he said. "Your friend, Miss Leigh, sent you as much love as I could conveniently transport, and an urgent message to come again."

"I shall be delighted," exclaimed Bertha, who was fast forgetting Irene's naughtiness, and recovering her spirits in the charm of her admirer's presence. Now that she had him all to herself, her horrible fears of her younger sister's rivalry grew less, and she resolved to make the very most of this glorious *tete-a-tete* under the beautiful moonlight with the soft notes of the entrancing dance-music blending with the murmuring of the melancholy sea.

She was succeeding almost beyond her expectations. Mr. Kenmore was lending himself to her efforts to charm with

unqualified approval.

He had dropped his indolent air of being bored by everything, and his dark eyes sparkled with interest, when suddenly the scene was changed, and Bertha's sentimentalisms interrupted by a little flying white figure that came through the window with a rush, and clutched Mr. Kenmore's arm frantically, with two desperate young hands, and looked up at him with eyes that were wide and dark with horror.

"Mr. Kenmore, oh, Mr. Kenmore," panted the sharp, shrill, frightened young voice, "do you know what they are saying in yonder?—what Mr. Clavering is saying? That—that—he is a *real minister*, and that it was a *real marriage*! It isn't true! Oh, my God, it can't be! Go, and make them say it is all a wretched joke to frighten me!"

There was a moment's stunned silence broken only by a scream of dismay from Bertha. Irene was gazing with a blanched face, and wild, beseeching eyes, up into the handsome, startled face of the man. Suddenly he pushed the white hands from his arm, broke loose from Bertha's clasp, and strode hastily through the window.

Irene fell upon the floor, all her childishness stricken from her by this terrible blow, and grovelled in abject terror.

Haughty Bertha spurned the little white figure with her dainty slippered foot.

"Get up," she said, harshly. "Get up, Irene, and tell me the truth! Is it true what you were saying, or only one of your

miserable jokes?"

Irene dragged herself up miserably from the floor, and clung to the balcony rail around which clambered a white rose vine. The snowy, scented roses were not whiter than her haggard young face.

"Oh, Bertha—Bertha, it is true," she said, despairingly. "That stupid Clavering didn't know we were joking. He is a minister—really a minister—but no one in the room knew it, because he is a stranger about here, you know, and staying at the hotel for his health. Oh, Bertha—Bertha, what shall I do? I don't like Mr. Kenmore! I don't want to be his wife!"

Bertha shook from head to foot with jealous rage.

"Listen to me, Irene Brooke," she said, in a hoarse, low voice of concentrated fury. "If this is true, if you really are Guy Kenmore's wife, I am your bitterest foe as long as you live! I'll make you repent this night's work in dust and ashes to your dying day!"

As the cruel words left her writhing lips, Mr. Kenmore came out, followed by Mrs. Brooke and her eldest daughter.

Irene's wild eyes searched the man's face imploringly,

"Yes, it is true," he said to her abruptly, almost harshly. "The man is an ordained minister, licensed to marry. You are really my wife!"

A piercing shriek, full of the sharpest anguish, followed on the last cold word. Irene threw up her white arms wildly in the air and fell like one dead at the bridegroom's feet.

CHAPTER V

When Irene Brooke recovered her senses she was lying on a sofa in the old familiar home-parlor which she had quitted such a little while ago a careless, happy, willful child. The soft locks that hung about her forehead were all wet and dabbled with *eau de cologne*, and Elaine bent over her with the face of a pitying angel, bathing her cheeks and temples with the refreshing perfume. The clock in the hall chimed the midnight hour, and lifting her head, that felt strangely dull and heavy, she gazed wonderingly around her.

In the subdued light that flooded the spacious parlor, Mr. Kenmore was walking slowly up and down with his hands behind his back. He came and knelt down by her side.

"You are better," he said, gently.

All her troubles rushed overwhelmingly over Irene, and she turned from him with a shudder.

"Ellie, where is papa? I want papa," she said, longing to lean in her trouble on the grand strength of the father who was dearer to her than all the world.

"He has never come home yet," Elaine answered in a troubled tone.

"Not yet, and he promised to return within the hour!" Irene exclaimed in vague alarm.

"He has been detained, doubtless," Mr. Kenmore said,

soothingly. "You know you said to-night, Irene, that when men went out on business they never came back for hours and hours."

Irene looked at him in wonder, his tone was so kind and gentle. A great, deep pity shone in his speaking eyes. He laid his strong white hand lightly on hers. She could not understand why his touch thrilled her through and through, and pulled her hand quickly away.

"Irene, do not turn from me so coldly," he said, in the same gentle tone at which she had wondered so much, "I have something to say to you. Will you listen to me?"

She lifted her dark blue eyes to his face, inquiringly.

"Since we brought you home, and while you lay unconscious, my child, I have been talking to your sister," he said. "I think—we both think—that you and I will have to accept the situation."

Elaine rose delicately and went to the window. Irene answered not a word. He went on, holding her gaze within his steady, grave, brown eyes:

"Through our carelessness and love of fun, we have fettered ourselves so effectually that we cannot break our bonds without exposing ourselves to a notoriety that would be galling alike to the pride of the Brookes and the Kenmores. Do you understand me, my child?" he inquired, pausing, and waiting for her reply.

"I understand—you mean–," she said, then paused, sensitively, while her cheeks grew very white, and her dry lips refused to go on.

"That it is doubtful if the law will free us from the marriage

vows we so unthinkingly uttered," he said. "If it did, it would only be at the expense of a newspaper notoriety that would be galling to our pride and a death-blow to sensitiveness. I own that I am proud," a deep flush coloring his face for a moment. "I cannot bear the thought of making the subject of numberless inane witticisms and newspaper paragraphs. I had rather accept the consequences of my folly."

"You are taking all the blame upon yourself," she said, in a low, strange voice that sounded very womanly for Irene, "when you know that it was all my fault."

"Do you think so? No, I was too careless, I should not have been led into their child's play," he said. "Well, no matter, let us make the best of it. I will be your faithful husband if you will be my true little wife, Irene."

The tone was very kind, but it was not that of a lover. Irene, though she had never been wooed, instinctively felt the subtle difference.

"You do not care for me—that way," she said, "and I—do not like you!"

"I have heard it said that it is best to begin with a little aversion," he answered, in a tone of patient good-humor.

"You belong to Bertha," she said.

"I belong to you," he retorted.

Elaine came slowly back from the window, looking like some tall, fair goddess in her shimmering pearl-gray silk. The tears were shining in her azure eyes.

"Irene, Mr. Kenmore is very kind," she said. "Believe me, he has made the wisest decision, if only you will acquiesce in it."

"Ellie, I don't wish to be married," cried the child.

"You are married already," Elaine answered, with a sigh, quickly repressed.

The beautiful child, who, by her own willfulness, had brought this doom upon her head, struggled up to a sitting posture. The sweet blue eyes had a dazed look. Grief had strangely changed her already.

"Let me alone, Ellie, and you, Mr. Kenmore, for a little while," she said, pitifully. "Wait until papa comes. He shall tell me what is best. Oh, it cannot be right that two lives should be spoiled by such a little mistake! Three lives, I mean," she added, wildly, "for Bertha loves him, and he belongs to her."

"Yes, he belongs to me," said a low, menacing voice in the door-way. "He belongs to me, Irene Brooke. Do not dare to take him from me!"

CHAPTER VI

It was Bertha's voice. She had been to her room, to indulge in a fit of mad passion and jealousy, but had returned and stood listening at the door for some moments—long enough indeed to hear all that had been spoken since Irene had recovered consciousness. Mad with passion she stood before them.

"He is mine," she said again, hoarsely. "Woe be to you, Irene Brooke, if you take him from me!"

She looked like some mad creature with the loosened coils of her shining hair falling down like long black serpents over the corsage of her ruby satin robe, and her black eyes flashing forth jealousy and defiance. The jeweled serpents that wreathed her white arms seemed to dart menace from their gleaming emerald eyes as she shook her hand.

Slowly Guy Kenmore turned and looked at her, honest amazement stamped on his handsome features.

"Miss Brooke, your assertion is a most strange one," he said. "I cannot understand why you should wish to complicate this unhappy affair still further by such a palpable injustice. On what grounds do you base your claim?"

Her flashing eyes fell a moment before the proud wonder in his. Then she asked, with a heaving breast and in deep agitation:

"Do you deny that you have made love to me? That you came to Bay View to woo me?"

A deep, warm color drifted over his face.

"Is it possible, Miss Bertha, that you have taken our idle flirtation in earnest?" he exclaimed, shame, surprise and self-reproach struggling together in his voice. "If you have, I beg your forgiveness a thousand times, for I thought you were simply amusing yourself, as I was. I admired you, certainly, but I never dreamed of love, I never thought of marriage."

If love changed to hatred could have slain, Guy Kenmore would have fallen dead before the vengeful lightnings of the brunette's eyes. Strong man though he was he shivered under their baleful glare. Her very voice was changed when she spoke again. It seemed to cut the air like a keen-bladed knife.

"So you were only amusing yourself," she said. "You made a plaything of a woman's heart! Did you ever hear of playing with edged tools? Ah, beware, Guy Kenmore, beware! My love would have been a thousand times better than my hate! And do you pretend to love *that* creature?" pointing a scornful finger at the drooping form of Irene.

Instinctively he moved a step nearer to his girl-bride, as if to shield her from some threatening danger.

"I make no idle pretences," he answered. "Irene is my wife. Love will come."

"Love," she sneered. "Love! Your cold, selfish heart is incapable of that divine passion! I understand why you would hold that willful child to the fetters so unwittingly forged! It is the Kenmore pride, that is afraid of being dragged through the

mire of the divorce court! You will never love her, never make her happy! You only take her to save your overweening pride."

"Oh, Bertha, hush! It is the best way out of our trouble," pleaded Elaine, gently.

"Best—ah, yes, you never dreamed of such a marriage for your *fatherless child*? A Kenmore—rich, honorable, high-born—to mate with the child of shame, the *nameless creature* whom we have shielded with our own honest name to save our family honor! Ha, ha, Guy Kenmore, are you not proud of your high-born bride—Elaine's base-born child, who never had a father?" screamed Bertha, wild with jealousy and anger, and flashing the lurid lightning of her great black eyes upon their blanched faces.

Like some beautiful enraged tigress, Irene sprang from the sofa, and ran to Bertha. She clutched her small white fingers in the brunette's round white arm, and their frantic clasp sunk deep into the flesh.

"You wicked, cruel woman, how dare you utter such a fiendish lie?" she panted, hoarsely. "How dare you malign the honor of my beautiful, pure-hearted Ellie? How dare you name us—Ellie and me—the honest daughters of old Ronald Brooke—in the same breath with dishonor!"

"I dare because it is true," hissed Bertha, breaking loose from the child's frantic grasp, and laughing like a beautiful demon. "Don't take my word for it! Ask that woman there whom my very words have crushed down to the earth! Ask her if she is not your mother! Ask her the name of your father! Ha, ha, Guy

Kenmore, accept my congratulations on your brilliant marriage," she sneered, as she rushed from the room.

Elaine Brooke had indeed sunk wretchedly to the floor at her sister's terrible charge. She crouched there forlornly, her face hidden in her trembling hands, her golden hair falling loose, and streaming in sad beauty over her quivering, prostrate form. Guy Kenmore, with blanched face and starting eyes, recalled Arthur's words to his faithless Guinevere. They seemed to fit this crushed woman:

> "Yet think not that I come to urge thy crimes;
> I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere,
> I, whose vast pity almost makes me die
> To see thee, laying there thy golden head,
> My pride in happier summers, at my feet."

With a single bound Irene reached the prostrate form. Her small hand fell heavily on Elaine's white, quivering shoulder.

"Ellie, Ellie, look at me," she said; "I want to see your face! I want to see the truth in your eyes!"

With a groan Elaine obeyed the imperious mandate of the sharp, young voice. She raised her head and looked into Irene's clear, searching eyes with a woful, white, white, face, on which the very agonies of death could not have written such despair.

"Irene, my love, my darling, do not curse me," she moaned. "It is true! I am your wretched mother!"

The beautiful, kneeling figure reeled backward with one hand

pressed on her heart as if it had been pierced by a sword-point.

"My mother—Elaine Brooke my mother," she groaned. "Oh, God, was ever sin and shame hidden beneath such true, sweet eyes and the face of an angel before? Do not ask me not to curse you! God may forgive you, but I never can! Now I know why they hate me, your mother and your sister. I have no right in the world, I have no name, no place, I am the living badge of my mother's dishonor! Great God, pity me! Strike me dead this moment at the feet of my guilty, shameless mother," she prayed, wildly lifting her wild, white face and anguished eyes to Heaven.

Guy Kenmore gazed like one paralyzed at the unhappy mother and daughter. He could not speak one word to either. The shocking disclosure of the maddened Bertha had almost stunned him. He was a proud man, as he had said. It was horrible to think of the stain on the girl he had wedded—the willful, naughty, yet beautiful girl whom with all her faults he had been proud to think was nobly born as the Kenmores.

CHAPTER VII

Elaine dragged herself up from the floor, and held out her arms imploringly to the lovely, imperious young creature, who regarded her with angry, scornful eyes.

"Irene, hear me," she said, humbly.

But Irene pushed off the clinging hands, cruelly.

"Do not touch me," she said, bitterly. "I am bad enough myself. The brand of shame is on me, and I have no name and no right in the world; but it is no sin of mine. *You—you* are the guilty one! The touch of your hand would burn me! Oh, God! oh, God! how came she by that angel's face and devil's heart?"

She had forgotten Guy Kenmore's presence as she hurled her denunciations at the lovely, despairing, sinful woman before her. Elaine did indeed have the face of an angel. Even in this moment, when her long-hidden and shameful secret became revealed to her child, her exquisite face had on it no remorseful shame. The rather it was touched with the despairing resignation of some pure, high heart which has found itself cast down and destroyed in its struggle against the wicked world. She lifted her sweet, sad, violet eyes, and cast a look of pathetic reproach upon Irene.

"My child, do you indeed believe me so vile and wicked?" she asked, mournfully.

"I am forced to judge you by your confession," Irene answered, with passionate shame.

"I have made no confession yet, I wish to do so now, if you will listen to me, Irene," said the beautiful woman in a tone of sad patience. "I am not guilty as you think me, oh, no, no, no!" she cried, shudderingly.

"You are my mother, and you are ashamed to claim me! You are a wretched sinner, and instead of hiding your disgraced head in seclusion, and trying to win the pardon and mercy of offended Heaven, you flaunt your beautiful face before the world, unforgiven and unrepentant!" cried out Irene, with all the hard severity of a young mentor.

Elaine wrung her beautiful, jeweled hands together, and tears fell one after another in a rapid stream down her cheeks upon the corsage of her dress, spotting and staining the rich silk.

"Irene, will you indeed be so hard and unforgiving?" she cried. "Will you judge and condemn me without hearing? Are you the sweet, loving child, whom I could always lead and persuade with a kind word?"

"I am no longer a child!" the girl cried out, bitterly. "I am a woman now. The events of to-night have laid years on my head and a burden on my heart! You might have led me by one thread of your golden hair while I believed you to be my pure, true-hearted sister who bore your mother's and sister's tyranny like an angel because you were too gentle to resent it. I understand it all now. You were afraid of them. Conscience made a coward of you, and they held your shameful secret like a whip-lash over your head and drove you hither and yon at the bent of their own

wills! Oh, shame, shame!" cried Irene, withering her mother by her sharp scorn.

"Yes, I have been a slave, a coward," Elaine murmured, mournfully. "But, oh, Irene, my poor child, I bore it all for my father's sake. He, at least, was kind and forgiving!"

The words recalled to Irene's mind the fond, indulgent old man whom she adored with all the strength of her ardent young heart. Mrs. Brooke and Bertha had been too harsh and cold to command her love, Elaine had vexed her impetuous spirit by her shrinking cowardice. But her father—the loving old man who has ever taken her part bravely against them all—it rushed over her with a chill like that of death that he belonged to her no longer, by that dear filial tie that had been the one unalloyed joy of her willful life, and a cry of exceeding bitter pain fell from her white lips.

"Papa, oh, my dear, my darling, I must lose you with the rest," she cried out in a voice sharp and shrill with despair. "Nothing of all I thought mine belongs to me! I must lose you, too, whom I loved with all my soul—lose you through the sin of her who brought me into a world where I have no place, no name! Oh, God, I cannot bear it! I wish that I were dead!" wailed Irene, in the bitterness of her despair.

Elaine gazed at her daughter like one dazed. All the youth, the joy, the childishness seemed stricken from her forever by the terrible revelation of to-night. The slender young figure stood apart from her in desperate grief, seeking no friendly arm to

lean on in its terrible isolation; the beautiful young face was cold and rigid with despair; the blue eyes, black now with her soul's emotion, flashed scorn through proud tears that would not fall. A woman's outraged soul, forlorn yet proud, shone through the tense young form.

Suddenly a firm touch fell on Irene's arm.

"Irene," said Guy Kenmore, low and sternly, "no more of these wild reproaches to your mother! You shall hear her offered confession first."

CHAPTER VIII

There was a moment's perfect silence in the room. The sound of the sea came to them soft and low, the wind stirred the flowers in the garden, and sent a gust of exquisite perfume through the windows. In the stillness Elaine moved a little nearer to her daughter, looking at the stern young face with unutterable love and longing in her eyes.

Irene turned coldly from that yearning glance and looked at Mr. Kenmore with a rebellious flash in her eyes.

He was very pale, the sparkle of mirth had died out from his dark eyes, his lips were compressed sternly.

"Hear your mother's story first," he repeated, gravely. "Do not condemn her before you know her whole sad secret. See how she suffers."

The calm, grave, masterful tone influenced Irene against her will. She glanced reluctantly at Elaine's face, and saw how terribly she suffered beneath the fiery lash of her daughter's scorn, but she spoke no word of comfort, only lowered her white-lidded eyes to shut out that harrowing sight.

"Why should I listen to her?" she said, almost sullenly. "What can she say to excuse her sin?"

"Hear me, and judge, Irene," said Elaine, creeping a little nearer, with a wistful gaze at the obstinate girl. "You, too, Mr. Kenmore. You have heard me taunted with my sin. Stay and hear

my exculpation."

He bowed silently and placed a chair for her; then he drew Irene down to a seat upon the sofa beside himself. She yielded with strange passiveness, unconscious that while she sat there his arm lay lightly but firmly around her waist, gently detaining her. She was conscious of nothing but a sharp, tearing pain at her heart, and that she was waiting with a sort of numb indifference to hear Elaine's palliation of her sin.

Elaine sat silently a minute, with her white hands locked convulsively in her lap. When she spoke she seemed to be communing with herself.

"Dear God," she whispered, "I had hoped that the child need never know her mother's secret! Ah, I might have known how hard and cruel Bertha would be some day!"

She lifted her eyes and fixed them in a sort of unwilling fascination on Irene's beautiful, mutinous face.

"I have lived years and years of sorrow and despair," she said, "but when I look back it seems only yesterday that I was a pretty, willful, loving child, such as Irene was until to-night. Ah, so like, so like, that I have sometimes shuddered and wept, fearing her fate would be like mine."

Irene made a passionate gesture of loathing and dissent.

"Ah, my child, you do not know," Elaine said, sadly. "The greatest temptation of woman has never come to you. You have never loved."

The fresh, young lips curled in utter scorn of that master-

passion whose fire had never breathed over her young heart.

"You have never loved," Elaine repeated, with a gesture of despair. "When that master passion first came to me I was a younger girl than you, Irene, and just as willful and headstrong and passionate. Bertha and I were away at boarding-school when I first met my fate."

She paused, trembling like a leaf in the wind, and resumed, mournfully:

"He was a cousin of one of the pupils, and came to a musical festival given by us at the first of the mid-winter term. I sang one or two solos, and it was then and there that this handsome scion of a proud and wealthy house fell in love with me."

"I have never loved as you say," interrupted Irene in her clear, bell-like voice, "but I should hesitate to call that feeling which only aims at the ruin of its object by the pure name of love."

Elaine bowed her golden head wearily.

"Let us say that he pretended to love me, then," she amended, sadly. "But, ah, Irene, if you had seen and heard him you would have believed his vows, too—you would have trusted in him as I did. No girl ever had a handsomer, more adoring lover."

"I was young, romantic, willful," she continued. "It seemed to be a case of true love at first sight. We met several times, and some foolish love-letters passed between us. There are more opportunities for such things than you would guess at the average boarding-school, Mr. Kenmore," she said, turning her blushing face upon him for a moment. "At this one, love-letters, stolen

walks, secret meetings were carried on to an alarming extent, one third of the pupils at least being as foolish and romantic as I was."

"I can understand," Mr. Kenmore answered, gently.

"Mamma was a stern and proud woman," Elaine resumed, with a sigh. "She was exceedingly proud of my beauty and my fine voice. A brilliant future was mapped out for me. But first I was to become a perfect prodigy of learning and accomplishments. At sixteen, when I was to finish the course at the Institute where I then was, I was to be sent to the Vassar College for a few years. 'Ossa on Pelion piled,'" she quoted, with a mournful smile.

"I knew that a love affair on my part would not be tolerated for years," she resumed. "My lover, as regards his family, was placed in the same position comparatively. A marriage of convenience was arranged for him, and he was forbidden to think of another. Madly in love with each other, and rebelling against our fetters, we planned an elopement. In three months after I met him we ran away to another State and were married."

"Married?" Irene echoed, with a hopeful start.

"We were married—*as I believed*," said Elaine, with a shudder. "There was a ceremony, a ring, a certificate. I was a child, not sixteen yet, remember, Irene. All appeared satisfactory to me. We went to a luxurious boarding-house where six months passed in a dream of perfect happiness. My husband remained the same fond, faithful lover he had been from the first day we met until the fateful hour when we parted—never to meet again,"

sobbed Elaine, yielding to a momentary burst of despairing grief that showed how well and faithfully she had loved the traitor who had ruined her life.

But feeling her daughter's cold, young eyes upon her, she soon stemmed the bitter tide of her hopeless grief.

"Our funds ran low," she continued, after a moment, "and he was compelled to leave me to go to his father and ask pardon and help. We were both young, and having been reared in the enervating atmosphere of luxury, knew not how to earn a penny. He went and—never came again."

"Villain!" Guy Kenmore uttered, indignantly.

"After waiting vainly a week I wrote to him," said Elaine, bowing her lovely head upon her hands. "His father came, full of pity and surprise. My God! I had been deceived by a mock marriage. He whom I loved so dearly, whom I believed my husband, had gone home, wedded the woman of his father's choice, and taken her abroad on a wedding trip. I had been ruthlessly forsaken.

"Then I remembered papa, whom I had loved truly and tenderly as you did, Irene. In my extremity and despair I wrote to him. He came, the dear father I had deserted and forgotten in the flush of my wifely happiness. He pitied and forgave me.

"Mamma and Bertha would not forgive, but they plotted to save the family honor. The affair had never been publicly known. We went abroad, and among strangers, where in a few months you were born, my poor wronged Irene. When we came

home mamma claimed my child for her own, and by her stern command I took my place in society and played my part as calmly as if my heart were not broken. Now, Irene, you know the full extent of your mother's sin. I have been wronged as well as you, my darling. You are nameless, but not through sin of mine."

Her faltering voice died into silence. Irene made no answer. She had dropped her face in her small white hands. Guy Kenmore felt the slight form trembling against his arm.

"I was mistaken in my first estimate of her," he thought. "She has more depth, more character than I thought."

Then he turned to Elaine.

"You have indeed been wronged bitterly," he said. "The fault is not yours, save through your disobedience to your parents."

"Yes, I was willful and thoughtless, and I have been most terribly punished for my fault," she replied, sorrowfully.

"Is there no possibility that you have been deceived by your husband's father? Such things have been," said Mr. Kenmore, thoughtfully.

"There was no deception. He was armed with every proof, even the newspaper, with the marriage of his son to the wealthy heiress whom his family had chosen for him," answered Elaine, blushing crimson for her unmerited shame and disgrace.

"Then your lover was a villain unworthy the name of man. He deserved death," exclaimed Guy Kenmore.

Elaine's angelic face grew pale as death. She sighed heavily, but made no answer.

Suddenly Irene sprang to her feet, with blazing eyes.

"His name!" she cried, wildly, "his name!"

"My poor child, why would you know it?" faltered Elaine.

"That I may hunt him down!" Irene blazed out. "That I may punish him for your wrongs and mine!"

"Alas, my darling, vengeance belongs to Heaven," sighed the martyred Elaine.

"It belongs to you and to me," cried Irene. "His name, his name!"

"I cannot tell you, dear," wept the wronged woman.

"Then I will go to Bertha," flashed the maddened girl.

"Bertha is bound by an oath never to reveal that fatal name," Elaine answered.

The door opened, Mrs. Brooke entered, stern and pale. She glanced scornfully at Irene, then turned to her daughter:

"Elaine, I am sorry this has happened," she said. "I could not keep Bertha from betraying you. The poor girl was driven mad by her wrongs. If Irene had remained away from the ball to-night, as I bade her do, you would have been spared all this. Her disobedience has caused it all."

Old Faith put her head, with its flaring cap-ruffles, inside the door before Elaine could speak.

"Oh, Mrs. Brooke, Mrs. Brooke!" she cried, and wrung her plump old hands disconsolately.

"Well, what is it? Speak!" cried her mistress, sharply.

"Oh, ma'am, some men have come—with news—they found

master down on the shore—oh, oh, they told me to break it to you gently," cried the old housekeeper, incoherently.

A flying white figure darted past old Faith and ran wildly down the broad, moon-lighted hall, to the old-fashioned porch, bathed in the glorious beams of the moonlight.

Mrs. Brooke went up to the woman and shook her roughly by the arm.

"What are you trying to tell me, Faith? What of your master?" she exclaimed. "Speak this instant!"

Elaine came up to her other side, and looked at her with wide, startled eyes.

"Oh, Faith, what is it?" she cried.

"They told me to break it gently," whimpered the fat old woman.

At this moment a shrill young voice, sharpened by keenest agony, wild with futile despair, came floating loudly back through the echoing halls:

"*Papa, oh, darling papa! Oh, my God, dead, dead, dead!*"

CHAPTER IX

They bore him into the parlor and laid him down. He was dead—the handsome, genial, kind old father, who had been Elaine's truest friend in her trouble and disgrace. It was strange and terrible to see the women, each of whom had loved the dead man in her own fashion, weeping around him.

Their gala robes looked strangely out of place in this scene of death. There was Bertha in her ruby satin and shining jewels, Elaine in her shimmering silk and blue forget-me-nots, Mrs. Brooke in crimson and black lace, lighted by the fire of priceless diamonds. Saddest of all, little Irene, crouched in a white heap on the floor at his feet, adorned in the modest bravery he had brought her for a birthday gift. Poor little Irene who has lost in this one fatal day all that her heart held dear.

A physician was called to satisfy the family. He only said what was plainly potent before. Mr. Brooke was dead—of heart disease, it appeared, for there were no marks of violence on his person. He was an old man, and death had found him out gently, laying its icy finger upon him as he walked along the shining sand of the bay, in the beautiful moonlight. His limbs were already growing rigid, and he must have been dead several hours.

"Dead! while we laughed and danced, and made merry over yonder in their gay saloons," Elaine wailed out, in impatient despair. "Oh, my God, how horrible to remember!"

Only Guy Kenmore saw that the right hand of the dead man was rigidly clenched.

"What treasure does he clasp in that grasp of death?" he asked himself, and when no one was looking he tried to unclasp the rigid fist. He only succeeded in opening it a little way—just enough to draw from the stiffened fingers a fragment of what had once been a letter—now only one line remained—a line and a name.

Guy Kenmore went to the light, spread the little scrap open on his hand and looked at it. The writing was in a man's hand and the few words were these:

> "That the truth may be revealed and my death-bed repentance accepted of Heaven, I pray, humbly.
> *"Clarence Stuart, Senior."*

Suddenly a cold little hand touched his own.

"I saw you," said Irene, in a low, strange voice. "What does it mean?"

"A great deal, or– nothing," he answered, in a voice as strange as her own.

She read it slowly over. The fragmentary words and the proud name seemed to burn themselves in on her memory.

"Who is Clarence Stuart?" she asked, wonderingly.

"I intend to find out," he answered. "When I do, I shall tell you, little Irene."

In his heart there was a deadly suspicion of foul play. Who had torn from old Ronald Brooke's hand the letter whose fragmentary

ending he grasped within that clenched and stiffened hand? Had there been murder most foul?

He went back and looked attentively at the corpse. It was true there was no sign of violence, but was that the face of one who had died from one instant's terrible heart pang, who must have died before he had realized his pain? No, the face was drawn as if in deadly pain, the open eyes stared wide with horror.

"I shall say nothing yet," he said to himself, gravely. "Let them think that death came in the quiet course of nature. But if old Ronald Brooke was murdered I shall bring his murderer to justice."

And on the man's handsome face, usually so gay and debonair, was registered a grim, firm purpose.

Mrs. Brooke and Bertha had been led away to their rooms now. No one remained for the moment but Elaine. She came slowly to her daughter's side.

"Irene, you must come with me now, she said, pleadingly, but the girl broke from her clasp and ran to throw herself on the dead man's breast.

"I cannot leave him yet," she sobbed. "He was my all!"

Elaine shivered, as if some one had struck her a blow. She followed her daughter, and solemnly took the dead man's hand in her feverish, throbbing clasp.

"Irene, my daughter, this, my own father whom I deceived and deserted, whose loving heart I broke by my folly—he pitied and forgave me," she said, mournfully. "My sin against you was far

less, for it was not premeditated. Here by papa's cold dead body I ask you, darling, to pity and forgive me. Will you refuse my prayer?"

Irene lifted her head from its chill resting-place and looked at her suppliant mother with a strange, grave gaze.

"We forgive every one when we are dying—do we not?" she asked, slowly.

"Yes, my darling, but you are young and strong. You have many years to live perhaps. I cannot wait till your dying hour for your love and pity. I need it now," sighed poor Elaine.

There was a moment's silence. Irene looked down at the dead man's face as if asking him to counsel her in this sad hour. As the wide, horror-haunted eyes met hers she recoiled in terror.

"*He* forgave you," she said, solemnly. "He cannot counsel me, but I will follow his example. Mother," she reached across that still form and touched Elaine's hand, "I forgive you, too. Always remember that I pitied and forgave you."

There was a strange, wild light in her eyes. It startled Elaine.

"My darling," she cried, half-fearfully.

"I must leave you now, poor mother," continued Irene, with that strange look. "I must go down to the shore where death waited for papa to-night. He is waiting there for me!"

She turned with the words and ran swiftly from the room. Frightened by her strange looks and words Elaine followed behind her, but her trembling limbs could scarcely carry her body.

Young, light, swift as a wild gazelle, Irene flew down the steps and across the garden. The moon was going down now, and only the flutter of her white dress guided the frantic mother in her wild pursuit. The garden gate unclosed, there was a patter of flying feet along the sands outside, there was a wild, smothered, wailing cry of despair, then—then Elaine heard the horrible splash of the waves as they opened and closed again over her maddened, desperate child.

CHAPTER X

The sound of Irene's pliant young body as it struck the cold waters of the bay, fell on the wretched mother's heart like a death-blow. The horrors of this fatal night culminated in this.

One long, terrible shriek as of some wounded, dying creature, startled the midnight hour with its despairing echoes, then she sprang wildly forward with the desperate intent to share her daughter's watery grave.

The weakness of her overwrought body saved her from the crime of self-destruction. Her head reeled, her limbs failed her. As she pushed the gate open with faltering hands she staggered dizzily and fell like a log on the hard ground. Merciful unconsciousness had stolen upon her.

That prolonged, despairing shriek reached Guy Kenmore's ears in the library, where he was gravely conferring with the men who had found Mr. Brooke dead upon the shore.

His first thought was of Irene. A dreadful foreboding filled his mind. He rushed from the room and followed the sound, the two men behind, all terrified alike by the anguish that rang in that mysterious shriek.

Outside the garden gate they found Elaine, lying like one dead on the hard earth. With tender compassion they lifted the beautiful, rigid form and bore it into the house.

That long, deep, deathly swoon was the beginning of a severe

illness for Elaine Brooke. It culminated in an attack of brain fever.

On recovering from her long spell of unconsciousness, Elaine revealed the cause of her illness. Two hours, perhaps, had passed since Irene's maddened plunge into the water. It was too late to save her then. The cold waves kept their treasure, refusing to yield it up to the efforts of those who, headed by Mr. Kenmore, made an ineffectual trial to find even the cold, dead body of the desperate girl. Dawn broke with all the roseate beauty of summer, and the golden light glimmered far over land and sea, but neither the wide waste of waters nor the sandy reaches of shore gave back sign or token of her who had found life too hard to bear, and so had sought Nepenthe from its ills and pains.

Guy Kenmore remained to Mr. Brooke's funeral, then returned to Baltimore a softened, saddened man—a man with a purpose. Two things had confirmed him in his purpose to trace the writer of the fragment found in the dead man's hand.

On the night of Mr. Brooke's death no sign of violence had been discovered on his person. On the day following a purplish mark was discoverable on the old man's temple—a strange, discolored mark. Careless lookers believed it to be the effects of decomposition.

Guy Kenmore, studying it with suspicious eyes, believed that it was caused by a blow—a blow that had caused Ronald Brooke's death.

Another thing was, that when Elaine Brooke went into a

delirious fever, that terrible dawn that broke on the tragic night, he had stood by her side a few moments, gazing at her in pain and sorrow. While he stood there she had startled him by calling wildly on one name. It was "Clarence, Clarence, Clarence!"

He sought Bertha.

"Will you tell me," he asked, gravely, and without preamble, "the name of the villain who deceived your sister?"

Bertha colored and trembled in shame and agitation.

"I cannot," she answered. "I am under a sacred promise not to reveal it."

"Was it Clarence Stuart?" he asked, coolly, and Bertha gave a terrible start.

"She has revealed it in her delirium," she exclaimed.

"Yes," he answered, calmly, knowing that he had surprised the truth from her reluctant lips.

Walking slowly along the shore, listening to the murmur of the waves, in which his bride of an hour had sought oblivion from the ills of life, Guy Kenmore thought it all out to his own satisfaction. That fragmentary line of a letter had told the whole sad story.

Elaine Brooke had been truly a wife. Her husband's father had deceived her by a trumped up story, and divided her from her young husband. Dying, he had repented his sin, and written a letter of confession to her father.

And here he fitted the second link of the story.

Some person unknown had found it to be against his or her interests that the truth should be revealed. That person had

followed the bearer of Clarence Stuart's letter, and had torn it from old Ronald Brooke's grasp, with a blow that meant death to the gentle, kindly old man.

Guy Kenmore honestly believed in the truth and accuracy of these deductions.

"If I can only find out where these Stuarts live, I will discover the guilty party," he said to himself. "I will not ask Mrs. Brooke nor Bertha. They would only believe me impertinent. I must depend on the gentle Elaine for information."

He concluded to return to his home in Baltimore, and await the issue of Elaine's illness.

CHAPTER XI

The time came weeks after when Elaine, pale, wan, shadowy, the sad ghost of her former beautiful self, came down to the parlor again and joined her mother and sister in the broken family circle whose severed links could never be re-united again.

Mrs. Brooke and Bertha were subtly changed, too. Their black dresses made them look older and graver. Bertha's grief at the loss of a kind, indulgent father, and her chagrin at Guy Kenmore's defection, had combined to plant some fine lines on her hither unruffled brow, and a peevish expression curled her red lips, while her large brilliant black eyes flashed with discontent and scorn. Over Irene's tragic death she had shed not a tear. She had always disliked the girl for her youth and winsome beauty and looked down on her for the stain upon her birth, always deploring that she had not died in infancy. The poor girl's willfulness the night of the ball had changed Bertha's dislike to hate. She was secretly glad Irene was dead. Better that than to have lived to be Guy Kenmore's wife.

Mrs. Brooke shared Bertha's feelings, only in a less exaggerated degree.

So Elaine found no sympathy in the loss of the beautiful daughter whom she had secretly worshiped, and over whose pretty defiant willfulness she had oftentimes shed bitter, burning tears of grief and dread.

The old gray hall which her sweet songs and musical laughter had once made gay and joyous was now hushed and silent as the tomb. The few servants glided about as if afraid of awaking the lonely echoes that slept in the wide, dark halls, and quiet chambers. No song nor laugh disturbed the silence. The mistress sat in the parlor pale and grave in her sweeping sables. Her daughters were no less grave and still, sitting in their chairs like dark, still shadows, with averted faces and silent lips, for Elaine had not forgotten Bertha's treacherous betrayal of her shameful secret; and Bertha, while she felt no remorse for her cruel work still felt shame enough to cause her to turn in confusion from the clear, sad light of her sister's eyes.

In the meantime that sad truth that oftentimes makes the pang of bereavement harder to bear, was coming home to them.

Mr. Brooke had died almost insolvent.

Once a man of almost unlimited wealth and position, the old tobacco planter had been almost ruined by the war which had freed his slaves, and left him only his broad-spreading, fertile acres, with no one to till them. His great income was almost gone, for with his losses through the war, he could not afford to replace with hired workmen the skilled labor he had lost.

In order to keep up the dignity of appearances which his proud wife considered necessary to herself and her beautiful young daughters, Mr. Brooke had been forced to sacrifice his land from time to time, until now, at the end, only a few acres remained of his once princely estate. The fine old gray-stone mansion,

Bay View, remained as a shelter for their heads, indeed; but the sacrifice of the remaining land would barely support them a year or two. Mrs. Brooke and Bertha were aghast at the prospect. They had expected that the latter would have been married off to some wealthy personage before the dire catastrophe of poverty overtook them. They quailed and trembled now beneath the subdued mutterings of the storm of adversity.

When Elaine came down and mingled with them again, they broke the bad tidings to her rudely enough.

"No more playing fine lady for us," Mrs. Brooke said, bitterly. "We can live on the land a little while, then we must sell our jewels, then our home, and when all is done, we shall have to work for our living like common people."

The aristocratic southern lady, who had never soiled her white, jeweled fingers in useful toil, broke down and sobbed dismally at the grievous prospect.

"Oh, I have had more than enough of trouble and sorrow in my life," she complained. "First, there was Elaine's disobedience and disgrace; then, losing our negroes by the war; then my poor husband dying so suddenly, without a farewell word, and now this horrible nightmare, poverty! Oh! I have never deserved these visitations of Providence," asseverated the handsome, selfish widow, energetically.

Bertha joined in these lamentations loudly. She would not know how to work when it came to that, not she. They should have to starve.

Elaine regarded them with troubled eyes.

"Mamma, do not grieve so bitterly," she said. "We are not come to absolute want yet."

"You take it very coolly," Bertha sneered. "When the last few acres of land are sold, how long will the proceeds keep three helpless women, pray?"

Elaine did not answer Bertha—did not even look at her. She went up to her mother's side.

"Mamma, I have foreseen this trouble coming," she said. "We have been living beyond our means for years, and even if poor papa had lived this crash must have come some day; I am very sorry," she repeated, gently.

"Sorrows will not put money into our empty purses," Mrs. Brooke answered, spitefully.

"I know that," Elaine answered, patiently. "But I have a plan by which your money may be made to last a little longer. I am going to leave you, mamma."

"Leave me," Mrs. Brooke echoed, feebly.

"Rats always desert a sinking ship," flung in Bertha with coarse irony.

Again her elder sister had no answer for her.

"I am going away," she repeated. "Even if papa had left us a fortune it would be the same, I could not stay here after—all that has happened."

"You mean,"—said Mrs. Brooke, then paused.

"I mean since I have lost papa and Irene," her daughter

answered, sadly. "You know, mamma, you and Bertha have never been kind to me since my great—trouble. You only tolerated me because my father wished it. I have long been in your way. It is all over now. To-morrow I shall leave you forever."

"Forever," Mrs. Brooke repeated, blandly, while Bertha exclaimed with a coarse, spiteful sneer:

"You will return to the life of shame from which papa rescued you perhaps."

"I am going to New York to earn my living by honest work," Elaine said, speaking pointedly to her mother. "You know I have a good voice, and talent for music. I shall give music lessons, probably."

"My daughter giving music lessons! Oh, what a disgrace to the family!" cried the aristocratic lady. "Are you not ashamed to put yourself so low, Elaine?"

"Don't be silly, mamma," flashed Bertha, sharply. "It is a very good plan, I think. Besides, it is only right for Elaine to give up the remainder of her property to us. If we had not been burdened with the support of her daughter for sixteen years there would have been more money for me."

"It is quite settled, mamma, I shall go," said poor Elaine, and the selfish mother weakly acquiesced.

The next day she went, glad of her freedom, glad to fling off the slavery of sixteen years.

"I could not have stayed even if poor papa had left me a fortune," she said to herself. "The sound of the waves sighing

over Irene's watery grave in the lonesome nights breaks my heart!"

CHAPTER XII

We must return to Irene Brooke that fatal night, whose accumulating horrors induced a transient madness that drove the wretched girl to seek oblivion from her woes in self-destruction.

Life is sweet, even to the wretched. Irene's sudden, violent plunge into the cold waves cooled the fever of her heart and brain like magic. In that one awful, tragic moment in which the waters closed darkly over her golden head, a sharp remorse, a terrible regret woke to life within her heart.

Out of that swift repentance and awful despair, a cry for pity broke wildly from her almost strangling lips:

"Oh, Lord, pardon and save me!"

As she came back from the depths with a swift rebound to the surface of the water, the girl threw out her white arms gropingly, as if to seize upon some support, however slight and frail, on which to buoy her drenched and sinking frame.

Joy! as if God himself had answered her wild appeal for help and pardon, a strong, wide plank drifted to her reach. Irene grasped it tightly and threw herself upon it, while a cry of thankfulness broke from her lips. Alone in the dark and rushing waves, her heart filled with relief at the thought of this frail barrier between herself and that mysterious Eternity, to which a moment ago she had blindly hastened.

"If I can only hold on a little while, Elaine will bring me help

and rescue," she said to herself, hopefully, and calling her mother by the old familiar sisterly name, for the name of mother was strange to her young lips yet.

Alas, for her springing hopes! Poor Elaine lay white and still in that long, long trance of unconsciousness that followed on her realization of her daughter's suicide. Her locked lips did not unclose to tell her anxious watchers the story of that white form floating on the dark waters, waiting, hoping, praying for rescue, while her strength ebbed, and her arms grew tired and weak, clinging so tightly to that slender plank that floated between her and the death from which she shrunk tremblingly now with all the ardor of a young heart that has found life a goodly thing and fair.

No rescue came. The girl floated farther and farther out to sea in that thick darkness that comes before the dawn. Hours that were long as years seemed to pass over her head, and hope died in her breast as the cruel waves beat and buffeted her tender form.

"I am forgotten and deserted," she moaned. "My mother has raised no alarm. Is it possible she was glad to be rid of me, and held her peace?"

A jeering voice seemed to whisper in her ear:

"It is best for all that you die. Bertha and her mother hated you. You were a stumbling block in your mother's path. You had involved Guy Kenmore in a fatal entanglement. You had no right and no place in the world. Not one whom you have left but will be glad that you are dead."

A cry of despair came from the beautiful girlish lips in the

darkness.

"Oh, God, and only yesterday life seemed so beautiful and fair! Now I must die, alone and unregretted! Oh, cruel world, farewell," she cried, for she felt her strength forsaking her, and knew that in a moment more her arms would relax their hold and that she would sink forever amid the engulfing waves.

But in that last perilous moment something occurred that seemed to her dazzled and bewildered senses nothing less than a miracle.

In her bodily pain and mental trouble, with eyes blinded by the salt sea waves that mixed with her bitter tears, Irene had not perceived the faint grey light of dawn dispelling the thick darkness of the night. But suddenly, all suddenly, the crest of the waves was illuminated marvellously by a gleam of brightness that shot far and wide across the water; the blank horizon glowed with light.

> "And on the glimmering limit far withdrawn
> God made Himself an awful rose of dawn."

Startled by the swift and seemingly instant transition from darkness to light, Irene uttered a shrill, sharp cry and looked up. The beautiful, life-giving sun was just peeping across the level green waves, and touching their foamy crests with gold. Through half-dazzled eyes she saw riding, like a thing of beauty on the beautiful water, a stately, white-sailed yacht only a few rods away.

Irene could see moving figures on her decks.

There was one awful moment when the girl's breath failed, her heart stood still, and she could scarcely see the moving yacht outlined against the rosy dawn, for the mist that filled her eyes. Then she shook off the trance that threatened to destroy her, and with one last, desperate effort sent her sharp young voice ringing clearly across the waves:

"Help! Help! In God's name, help!"

The cry was heard and answered by the moving figures on the vessel's deck.

CHAPTER XIII

Was it hours or moments before the gallant figure that sprang over the side of the yacht reached Irene's side?

The girl never knew, for even as she watched his progress through the water, and admired his swift and graceful swimming, a dizziness stole over her; her arms relaxed their hold; the friendly plank slipped from beneath her, and she felt herself sinking down, down into the fathomless depths of green water.

It was well that her rescuer was a skillful diver, or our hapless heroine's history must have ended then and there.

But the dauntless swimmer who had gone to her assistance was brave, bold, daring. He redoubled his speed, made a desperate dive beneath the water and reappeared with the form of the exhausted and unconscious girl tightly clasped in one arm.

In the meantime a small boat had been lowered from the yacht, and was coming with rapid strokes to her assistance.

When Irene came to herself again she lay on a pile of blankets upon the deck of the yacht. An anxious group was collected around her, conspicuous among them being one wet and dripping figure whom she instinctively recognized as her gallant preserver.

Irene opened her beautiful eyes, blue as the cerulean vault above, and smiled languidly at the stranger.

The man, who was middle-aged and had the rich, dark, picturesque beauty of the southern climate, started and bent over

her. He grew ashy pale beneath his olive skin.

"She recovers," he said, hoarsely. "She will live."

"Clarence, Clarence," cried a thin, peevish, authoritative voice at this moment, "I insist that you shall go and change your wet clothing this moment! You will catch your death of cold standing around here drenched and shivering."

Irene turned her languid eyes and saw a pale, faded, yet rather pretty little woman, clothed in an elegant blue yachting dress with gold buttons. She was looking at Irene's rescuer with a peevish look in her light hazel eyes.

The man scarcely seemed to heed her, so intent was his gaze at Irene. Some one handed him a glass of wine at that moment, and, kneeling down, he lifted the girl's head gently on his arm and held it to her lips.

"Drink," he said, in a voice so kind and musical it thrilled straight through the girl's tender heart. She drank a little of the beautiful, ruby-colored liquid, and it ran like fire through her veins, warming and reviving her chilled frame.

"Clarence," again reiterated the woman's peevish voice, "do oblige me by changing your wet clothing. You seem to think less of your own health than of this total stranger's."

His brow clouded over, but he forced a smile on his handsome face.

"Very well, Mrs. Stuart, I will do so to oblige you," he said; "but pray do not make me ridiculous among my friends by such unfounded apprehensions! I am not a baby to be killed by a bath

in salt water!"

He went away, and several ladies came around Irene, gazing curiously at the pale, fair face. They whispered together over her wondrous beauty, which, despite the long hours of suffering endured in the water, shone resplendently as some fair white flower in the beams of the rising sun.

"Her clothing should be changed, too," said one, more thoughtful than the rest. "She shall have my bed and dry clothing from my wardrobe. She is about my size, I believe."

Irene smiled her languid gratitude to the kind-hearted lady, then her weary eyes closed again. An overpowering drowsiness and languor was stealing over her. When they had changed her drenched clothing for warm, dry, perfumed garments, and laid her in a soft, warm bed, she could no longer keep awake. She swallowed the warm, fragrant tea they brought her and fell into a long, deep, saving slumber.

The ladies were all burning with curiosity over the beautiful waif so strangely rescued from the cruel waves, but they refrained through delicacy from asking her questions when they saw how weary and exhausted she was. When she was asleep they examined her wet, cast-off linen for her name, but were disappointed, for they found none.

Then, with feminine curiosity, they peeped into the gold locket that hung by its slender chain around Irene's neck.

"What a handsome old man, and what a beautiful woman!" they cried. "Who can the girl be?"

Everyone was eager and interested except the faded, peevish Mrs. Stuart. She openly railed at her husband for risking his life for an utter stranger. She would not allow anyone to praise his bravery in her presence.

"I will not have him encouraged in such bravado and foolhardiness," she said, angrily.

CHAPTER XIV

"Oh, Mrs. Leslie, isn't she just lovely? And she cannot be much older than I am!"

Irene had slept profoundly for a day and night, being physically and mentally exhausted by her terrible ordeal in the water. When she awoke after twenty-four hours of restful slumber those words of admiration rung in her ears, uttered by a soft, girlish voice, interrupted by an ominous hacking cough.

Irene opened her eyes and glanced languidly around her. Beside her bed she saw Mrs. Leslie, the little lady who had been so kind to her the day before. Next to the lady, in a low, cushioned rocker, sat a girl of thirteen or fourteen, richly and tastefully dressed, but with a thin face as white as alabaster, save for two burning spots of hectic on her hollow cheeks, and with large, brilliant black eyes burning with the feverish fire of consumption.

"So you are awake at last!" cried the girlish voice, joyously, "I thought you were going off into a regular Rip Van Winkle sleep, and I have been just dying of curiosity over you."

Irene felt the sudden crimson dying her cheeks at the vivacious exclamation of the delicate-looking girl.

"Lilia, my love, you startle her," said Mrs. Leslie, gently; then she bent over Irene, saying kindly: "You feel better, I hope, after your long rest. This is Miss Stuart, the daughter of the gentleman

who saved your life. She has been very anxious over you."

Irene looked gratefully at the dark-eyed girl who rose impulsively and kissed her.

"You are so pretty, I love you already," she cried, and Mrs. Leslie laughed.

"Pretty is as pretty does," she said, gaily, and Irene crimsoned painfully, as if the words had been a poisoned shaft aimed at her breast.

"Are you going to be well enough to sit up to-day?" pursued Lilia Stuart, anxiously. "Because if you are, I want you to come into my little saloon with me. I will give you my softest lounge to lie on. Aren't you very hungry? Will you take your breakfast now?"

"Yes, to all of your questions," Irene answered, looking in wonder at this girl who was but two years younger than herself, yet who seemed so very light and childish. Alas, poor Irene, that fatal night had forced her into a premature womanhood.

When she had taken a light, appetizing breakfast, and been robed in a white morning-dress, Mrs. Leslie advised her to spend the day in Lilia Stuart's saloon.

"She is a spoiled child," she said, "but we humor her all we can, for hers is a sad fate. She is dying of consumption."

"Dying– so young!" cried Irene with a shudder, remembering how horrible the thought of death had appeared to her while she was struggling in the cold, black waves.

"Yes, poor child, she is surely dying," sighed Mrs. Leslie. "Her

father bought this beautiful yacht to take her to Italy by the advice of her physicians. They fancied a sea voyage might benefit her. But I do not believe she will survive the trip. Some days she is very ill. Poor little Lilia. It is very hard. She is Mr. Stuart's only child."

They went to Lilia's luxurious saloon which was fitted up with every comfort, and was exquisitely dainty and charming, though small. Mrs. Stuart was there with her daughter. She gave the stranger a little supercilious nod, and invited Mrs. Leslie to go on deck with her.

Lilia, who had just recovered from a violent spell of coughing, led her visitor to a softly cushioned satin lounge.

"You may rest here," she said. "I am well enough to-day to sit up in my easy-chair, but some days I lie down all day. You may call *me* Lilia. What shall I call you?"

"You may call me Irene," was the answer, while a burning flush mounted to the speaker's forehead.

"Irene– what a soft, sweet name! I like that," said Lilia, and just then the door unclosed and her father came in softly. "Ah, here is papa! you see I have a visitor, papa," she cried.

Mr. Stuart was a handsome, stately-looking man, middle-aged, with abundant threads of silver streaking his dark hair. His mouth, in repose, looked both sad and stern.

Irene arose and held out her hands.

"I owe you my life," she said, gratefully.

A transient, melancholy smile lit the grave, dark face.

"You need not thank me," he said, almost bruskly. "Wait until years have come and gone, and you have fairly tested life. It will be a question then whether you will award me blame or praise for the turn I did you yesterday."

The large, dark, melancholy eyes held Irene's with a strange fascination.

"Ah! you think that youth is all sunshine and roses," she answered, almost against her will. "I have already learned the reverse of that, and yet I find life sweet."

"How came you to be in the water?" he asked, anxiously, sitting down and drawing Lilia to a seat upon his knee.

The deep color rushed over Irene's pale, lovely face. A deep shame overpowered her, and yet against her will something within her forced her to confess her sin.

"You will be shocked," she said; "but I must tell you the truth. I threw myself in."

"No," he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes," she answered, sadly.

"Oh, Irene, why did you do that?" exclaimed little Lilia.

"Why did you do it?" echoed the man.

"I had lost the only friend I had on earth, and I did not wish to live," she answered.

"Then I was right. You will not thank me for saving your life," exclaimed Mr. Stuart.

"Yes, for I repented my rashness as soon as my body struck the cold waves," she answered, shivering. "I am thankful my life

was spared to me. Life is hard, but death is harder."

He looked at the beautiful, agitated girl with deep interest. He began to see that there had been some romance in her life. Her face had a tragedy written on it.

"You will wish to return to your home and your friends?" he said.

An exceedingly bitter expression crossed the lovely young face, and for a moment she was silent. To herself she said: "I have neither home, nor friends, nor name. Those whom I left will be glad to think that I am dead."

Her heart was hardened against them all. She believed that her mother had left her to perish without one effort at rescue.

"She was glad to be rid of her illegitimate child," she said to herself, with inexpressible bitterness.

Mr. Stuart, thinking she had not heard him, repeated his question.

"You will be glad to return to your home and friends?"

She raised her large, beautiful eyes to his face. They were dark with unutterable despair.

"I have neither home nor friends—nor name!" she said.

He started, and looked at her keenly.

"You must have borne some name in the world," he said, almost sternly.

"I did; but I had no right to it, and I have renounced it forever. I am called Irene. That is the only name I can rightfully claim," she answered, bitterly, and drooping her shamed eyes from his

earnest gaze.

For a moment both were silent.

Mr. Stuart's dark, sad eyes were fixed on her with a look that was almost pain. This fair, mysterious waif from the sea, stirred his soul to its deepest depths. His presence held the same mysterious fascination for her.

Lilia, the most innocent child in the world, and who had been listening with deepest interest, broke the silence, wide-eyed.

"You have only one name," she said. "How strange! I thought everyone had two names. I have. Mine is Lilia Stuart. Mamma's is the same. Papa's name is Clarence Stuart."

She paused, for a stifled cry broke from Irene's lips. The dainty saloon, the faces of the father and child seemed to fade before her. She was back in the parlor of Bay View, that fatal night when they had brought old Ronald Brooke home dead. Again she saw, through the blinding mist of her tears, Guy Kenmore extricating the fragment of paper from the dead hand. Again she looked over his arm and read:

> "That the truth may be revealed, and my death-bed repentance accepted of Heaven, I pray humbly.
> *"Clarence Stuart, Senior."*

"My God! what does it mean?" she asked herself; and Guy Kenmore's ambiguous answer recurred to her mind:

"A great deal—or nothing!"

"Irene, are you ill?" asked Lilia, anxiously. "You almost screamed out, and your face is as white as chalk!"

"I am very nervous. You must not let me frighten you, Lilia," the girl answered, sadly.

Lilia came coaxingly to her side.

"I am going to tell you something," she said, with her pretty air of a spoiled child. "While you were asleep I was very naughty. I peeped at the beautiful lady in your locket!"

"Lilia!" her father exclaimed.

"All the ladies looked, papa," Lilia answered, self-excusingly. "And I am going to have one more peep! Irene will not care, I know!"

She flashed the lid open suddenly before his dazzled eyes. He could not choose but see that fair face, with its haunting eyes, and tremulous smile, and golden hair, Elaine's perfect image, even to the shadow of a tragedy that even a stranger could read on her beauty.

He gazed and gazed, and the breath fluttered sharply over his parted lips. Then, all in a moment, with a smothered cry of despair, he put out his hands and shut out the sight of the lovely face, even as his head fell back against the chair, his breath failed, and he lay all white and corpse-like before the two frightened girls.

CHAPTER XV

Bertha had promised to keep Guy Kenmore informed of the progress of Elaine's illness, and she was glad to keep her word, as it afforded her a pretext for writing to the young man, and thus keeping her memory alive in his heart.

Since the supposed death of poor Irene, the artful Bertha was again laying plans for the capture of Mr. Kenmore. She hoped in time to allay the unfavorable impression she had created in his mind the night of the ball, and to establish an empire over his heart. Mr. Kenmore belonged to one of the wealthiest and most aristocratic families in Baltimore, and it was the hight of her ambition to become his wife.

Though the young man's interest in Elaine afforded her a pretext for corresponding with him, Bertha was vaguely displeased at his anxiety over her sister. It filled her with secret jealousy. Elaine was still young and beautiful enough to win the heart of the man who had married her daughter. Bertha was determined not to tolerate her as a rival.

"There is no accounting for men's tastes," she said, angrily, to her mother. "I supposed that his knowledge of Elaine's shameful secret would utterly disgust him with her. But he is almost as anxious over her as if he were her lover."

"Men regard these things somewhat differently from women," replied Mrs. Brooke. "It is possible he may regard Elaine with

pity, rather than disgust. And pity is akin to love, you know."

In her heart Mrs. Brooke was rather elated at Guy's interest in Elaine. If she could not secure him for Bertha, she would be very pleased to have him for her elder daughter.

Bertha saw the bent of her mother's mind, and inwardly raged at it. Day and night her mind was filled with projects for diverting Guy's mind from the charms of her elder sister. On this particular state of her mind Elaine's announcement of leaving Bay View fell like healing balm.

Several days elapsed after her departure before Bertha communicated the fact to Mr. Kenmore in a brief, ambiguous note.

It was no part of her plan that he should become acquainted with their poverty, or with the reason of Elaine going.

So she wrote simply:

"Elaine convalesced more rapidly than was expected, and has left us in anger, declining to live with us longer, and making a mystery of her destination. Come down to Bay View and I will give you the particulars."

The note had the effect she anticipated of bringing Mr. Kenmore down to Bay View without delay.

Then Bertha told her story with well-acted grief and penitence.

"It was all my wretched fault," she sighed. "Elaine would not forgive me for giving way to my jealous passion that dreadful night, and betraying her shameful story. It was all in vain

that I declared my penitence on my knees and implored her forgiveness. She would not hear me. She declared that she should hate me so long as she lived, and that the same roof could not shelter us both. So she went away from mamma and me, declaring that it was forever."

The arch deceiver here shed some quiet, natural-looking tears into her perfumed, black-bordered handkerchief.

"It was very hard, losing papa and Elaine, and poor little Irene, all, as it were, at one fatal stroke," she declared, sobbingly.

Mr. Kenmore was gravely, sadly silent. He did not think of doubting Bertha's clever tale. It seemed very natural that poor Elaine should resent her sister's cruel betrayal of the long-guarded secret of Irene's birth. He scarcely wondered that she had gone away desperately wounded and unforgiving, in the smart of her bitter pain.

"Oh, if you could know how bitterly I have repented all that I said that dreadful night," sighed Bertha, giving him a sidewise glance under her long, black lashes. "I must have been mad, I think. You know the great poet says, 'There's madness in the moon,' and that night Irene had fairly driven me wild. Oh, if I could only think you had forgotten the unkind things I said to you in my foolish passion!" she pursued, remorsefully.

Her pretty shame and penitence touched him.

"I wish that you could forget it as freely as I forgive it, Miss Brooke," he answered, kindly.

"Oh, thank you, thank you," she cried. "I have repented my

folly in bitterness and tears. I let my own heart deceive me. I know now that a woman should not give her heart unasked, still less betray its tender throbbings to the cold and careless."

She hid her face in her hands as if she could not bear his kindly gaze. Guy, touched by her tears and sorrow, did not know what to say or do. He was intensely sorry for her, forgetting how much he had disliked her that night when she had shown herself in her true colors.

"Let us forget it all, Miss Brooke," he said, uneasily, anxious to dry up her springing tears.

The beautiful brunette gave him a swift, shy look of gratitude.

"Oh, how gladly I will do so!" she exclaimed, putting out her delicate, white hand to him. "Shall we be friends as we were before– that fatal night?"

"Yes," he replied, pressing her hand kindly, but lightly, for he had no mind to be drawn into the *role* of a lover again.

"And you will come down to Bay View sometimes? Mamma and I will be so lonely and sad now, after losing so many dear links from our family circle," said the dark-eyed beauty, following up her advantage.

"Sometimes—when I can find leisure," he replied ambiguously.

And with that Bertha was obliged to be content. She hoped great things from the concessions he had already made. Now that Irene was dead, and Elaine gone, she would have no rivals, and surely, surely her beauty, her fascination, her tenderness for him

must win him even against his will.

She brought the whole battery of her charms and graces to bear upon him, but was obliged to confess to herself that she had never seen him so sad, so grave, so pale and so *distrait*.

"It cannot be that he is sorry over that child's death. He ought to be glad," she thought to herself. "It must be that he assumes this gravity in deference to my affliction."

Yet she was troubled and chagrined when he left her so indifferently and went down to the shore. She watched him from her window, standing quietly, with folded arms, a tall, dark shape, outlined against the brightness of the summer eve.

"Of what is he thinking?" she asked her heart, uneasily.

It would have seemed strange to her if she had known. It even seemed strange to himself.

He was standing there gazing with dark, heavy eyes at the rolling waves, much as if he had been gazing on a grave.

He was recalling to mind the winsome, changeful, perfect beauty, the fire, the soul, the passion of the girl he had so strangely wedded, the girl who had recklessly flung herself into the deep, relentless waves, leaving him only the memory of the few, brief hours in which she had flashed before him in the extremes of joy and despair– one moment a beautiful, spirited, happy child, the next a passionate, despairing, crushed and broken-hearted woman!

"Poor little Irene," he said to himself. "If she had lived, who knows"—then a sigh, deeper than he knew, finished the regretful

words.

CHAPTER XVI

He stood there a long, long time, listening to the beat of the waves, and thinking of Irene and her mother. Bertha grew tired of watching him and stole away to try the effect of a new mourning bonnet that had just been sent home from the milliner. Guy had forgotten her. He was wrapped in other thoughts. New feelings had come to him since that night, when, indolent, *blase*, careless, he had come face to face with his fate. He was haunted by a voice, a face. Some sad words came to his mind:

> "How could I tell I should love thee to-day,
> Whom that day I held not dear?
> How could I know I should love thee away
> When I loved thee not anear?"
>
> "Oh, that word Regret!
> There have been nights and morns when we have sighed:
> 'Let us alone, Regret!'"

He turned away at last warned by the darkening twilight that fell like a pall over his lost bride's "vast and wandering grave."

"I must bid adieu to Mrs. Brooke and Bertha and return home to-night," was the thought in his mind.

Mrs. Brooke was in the parlor alone, Bertha being still absorbed in the new bonnet. A sudden impulse came to Guy

Kenmore.

He sat down by the matron's side and gazed sympathetically into her still youthful-looking and handsome face.

"Miss Brooke left you no address when she went away, I presume?" he inquired in a tone of respectful anxiety.

Mrs. Brooke had received her cue from Bertha and answered accordingly:

"No. She has deserted us most heartlessly, and I fear, I fear"–she broke down and buried her face in her handkerchief.

"You do not suppose that she can have made away with herself?" he cried in low, awe-struck tones.

"No, no; worse, far worse," groaned the apparently deeply agitated woman. "Oh, Mr. Kenmore, pity the grief and shame of a heart-broken mother—I fear that Elaine has returned to her wicked deceiver."

"Impossible!" he exclaimed, in stern and startled tones.

"Would that I could think so," sighed the unjust mother. "But my heart is torn by cruel suspicions. Elaine has never ceased to love that wicked wretch, and to whom else can she have gone?"

To herself she said, self-excusingly: "Poor Elaine, I would not blacken her name still more, only to help Bertha. If she marries him I shall manage to let him find out the real truth about Elaine directly afterward. She shall not lie under that base imposition any longer than is necessary for Bertha's welfare."

She was startled when she saw how reproachfully and sternly his brown eyes gleamed upon her.

"A mother is the last person to impute sin to her child," he said.

Mrs. Brooke only sobbed into her handkerchief by way of answer to this reproach.

"I have become deeply interested in your daughter's sad story, Mrs. Brooke," he went on. "Pray do not think me inquisitive if I ask you one question."

She looked it him in startled surprise.

"It is only this, Mrs. Brooke," he said. "Will you tell me in what city lived the man who so cruelly wronged beautiful Elaine?"

"It can do no good to rake up these old things," she said, half-fretfully.

"It was only a single question. It cannot hurt you to answer," he said, almost pleadingly.

She said to herself that it could not matter indeed, and she did not wish to offend the young man whom she hoped to capture for her son-in-law.

"It is very painful re-opening these old wounds," she sighed; "but since you insist upon it I will answer your question. The young villain lived at Richmond."

He bowed his thanks.

"I already know his name," he said, "and since you have no son to send upon this delicate mission, Mrs. Brooke, I will make it my business to inquire if your elder daughter has indeed deserted you for her base betrayer."

She was about to protest against his doing so on the first pretext she could think of, when Bertha's entrance suddenly closed the conversation.

He made his adieux and departed, giving an evasive reply to the young lady's wishes for his swift return.

One week later Mrs. Brooke received a letter from him dated at Richmond.

"You wronged your daughter by your unkind suspicions," he wrote; "she is not with the man you thought. Clarence Stuart left Richmond on the very day of your husband's death, in his own yacht, with his wife and daughter, and a party of friends. They were on a pleasure-trip to Italy. You will no doubt be glad to hear that Elaine is not so wicked as you believed her."

Thus the letter closed abruptly. Mrs. Brooke, in a curt note, thanked Mr. Kenmore for his information. She did not dare give way to her indignation at his interference, dreading that it would injure the success of Bertha's husband-hunting.

CHAPTER XVII

Lilia Stuart was very much frightened by her father's strange seizure. She was about to scream loudly for help when Irene, with a sensitive horror of scenes, laid her white hand gently but firmly over the parted lips.

"Do not be frightened, Lilia," she said. "Get some cold water. That is all that is necessary."

Lilia sprang to the ice-flagon and returned with a glass of cold water in her trembling grasp. Irene thrust her white hand into the cold fluid, and deluged Mr. Stuart's rigid white face with it.

It produced the desired effect. Mr. Stuart shivered, opened his eyes, and stared blankly around him for a moment.

"Oh, papa, you are better," cried Lilia, springing to throw her arms around his neck. "I am so frightened, dearest papa, shall I not call mamma?"

Something like dread or fear flashed for a moment into his open dark eyes.

"No, for Heaven's sake, don't!" he exclaimed, testily; "I detest scenes! There is nothing at all the matter with me! Say nothing to your mother, Lilia. You understand me?"

"Yes, papa," the girl replied, obediently. "But what made you faint?" she continued, curiously.

An expression of deep annoyance clouded Mr. Stuart's handsome face.

"Pooh, I did not faint," he said, sharply. "A mere dizziness overcame me. Don't let your fancies run away with your reason, Lilia."

He rose as he spoke, and without a glance at Irene or the open locket that still swung at her throat, hastily quitted the room. Lilia, forgetting her guest, followed after him.

Irene thus left alone, fell into a startled revery.

She had not been deceived like Lilia by Mr. Stuart's short assertion of dizziness. She knew that he had actually fainted, and she believed that the bare sight of her mother's face in the locket had been the cause of his agitation.

"He recognized the face, and it had power to stay the very pulses of his life for a moment," she said to herself.

A terrible suspicion darted into her young mind, chilling the blood in her veins, and driving it coldly back upon her heart.

"Can this man be my father, my mother's base betrayer?" she thought.

She did not like to think so. Her heart had gone out strangely to this man, the savior of her young life. She liked to think that he was noble, good and brave. For the villain who had betrayed her trusting young mother she had nothing in her heart but hatred, and a burning desire for revenge.

Suddenly the saloon door opened softly. Mr. Stuart had eluded Lilia and returned.

He came to her side and sat down again. His dark face was strangely pale still. There was a troubled look in his large, dark

eyes.

"You must have thought my agitation strange just now, Irene," he said.

"Yes," she answered, gravely.

"And—you guessed the reason?" he inquired, slowly, fixing a keen glance on her face.

She raised her beautiful, troubled blue eyes steadily to his.

"You recognized the pictures in my locket," she replied, touching it with her trembling hand.

"My God, yes!" he answered hoarsely. "Irene, child, for the love of Heaven, tell me what this man and woman are to you."

She had no answer for him. In her own heart she was saying, dumbly:

"I cannot tell him. It is my mother's secret. She guarded it for sixteen years, and I must not betray her."

He looked at the white, agonized face of the girl, and repeated his question:

"Tell me what this man and woman are to you."

"I cannot tell you, Mr. Stuart," she replied, falteringly.

"You mean you will not," he said, studying her downcast face, with grave, attentive eyes.

"I *cannot*," she replied. "It is a secret that belongs to others. I cannot betray confidence."

A baffled look came into his troubled, marble-white face.

"Do you mean to preserve an utter *incognito* among us?" he asked.

"I must," she answered, while great, trembling tears started beneath her drooping lashes. "I can say no more than what I have told you already. I am homeless, friendless, nameless!"

"How old are you?" he inquired.

"I was sixteen years old but a few days ago," she answered.

He looked again keenly at her face, and bending forward, again looked at the beautiful, pictured face of Elaine Brooke.

A shudder shook his form.

"You are strangely like her—strangely like," he said. "Child, I would give much to hear you say what this beautiful woman is to you."

Irene looked gravely at him, her young bosom shaken by a storm of suspicion.

"Confidence invites confidence," she said, harshly. "I will tell you what this woman is to me if you tell me what she once was to you."

CHAPTER XVIII

Irene's stern, abrupt question produced a startling effect upon Mr. Stuart. His face grew ashy pale, even to his lips, and he gazed suspiciously, almost angrily, at the girl's grave face. Seeing only an earnest wonder mirrored in her clear, sweet eyes, he sprang abruptly from his seat, and without replying to her question began to pace rapidly up and down the room.

Her grave, troubled eyes followed him slowly up and down, while a terrible pain tore her heart.

He seemed to have forgotten her presence, as with clenched hands and wildly staring eyes he paced up and down, muttering bitter phrases to himself.

Irene caught the echo of some passionate words quoted in a voice of raging scorn:

> "Falser than all fancy fathoms,
> Falser than all songs have sung,
> Puppet to a father's threat,
> And servile to a shrewish tongue."

Suddenly he stopped in his wild march, and came back to her side.

"No, child, keep your secret," he said, hoarsely. "Keep your secret, and I will keep mine. God help you if yours be as hard to bear as mine."

She must have pitied the dreary despair of his face and voice if her heart had not been hardened against him by her terrible suspicions. A hard, scornful laugh broke over her lips.

"Remorse is always hard to bear," she said, bitterly, to herself.

He looked at her in wonder.

"We will keep our own sad secrets," he repeated, mournfully. "But you are friendless. I will be your friend. You are homeless. My home shall be yours. You are nameless. You shall be Lilia's sister, and share her name. It is a noble one, and has never been stained by disgrace."

She looked at him gravely, fixedly.

Did he speak the truth? Did not her mother's shame and hers lie at his door?

"Do you accept my proposition?" he inquired, anxiously.

For a moment she was tempted to give him an angry passionate denial, to say bitterly:

"No, I will not have these things on sufferance that should be mine by right. I will not have your favor or your pity, you demon, who blasted my mother's life and mine! I could rather curse you!"

But on a sudden she remembered that her suspicions were merely suspicions. She had no proof that this noble-looking man, who seemed crushed by the weight of some inward sorrow, was her father. Perhaps she wronged him in her thoughts.

"I must give him the benefit of the doubt, since he saved my life," she thought, and put out a cold, little hand to him.

"I must perforce accept your kindness," she said, mournfully,

"since I have not a friend to turn to in all the wide, wide world."

He crushed the slender fingers in his firm clasp.

"I will be your friend, always—remember that," he said.

Irene would have thanked him feebly, but the saloon door hastily unclosed, admitting Lilia and her faded, peevish-looking mother.

"You here, Clarence!" exclaimed the latter, in a tone of marked displeasure.

He gave her a quick, cold look. Her eyes fell before it. Cowed by her husband's superior will, she vented her spite on Irene.

"Lilia has been telling me that you threw yourself into the water," she said, flashing her eyes full of greenish rage on the pale young girl. "Oh, you wicked, wicked girl!"

"Madam!" exclaimed Irene, in a proud and haughty tone.

Mr. Stuart advanced, and drew his wife's arm through his own.

"Come with me, Mrs. Stuart, I want you," he said, leading her deliberately from the room.

Lilia stood looking at Irene's indignant face, with a strange expression. The child was like a cat, one moment all silky fur and purring fondness, the next ready to attack with teeth and claws.

She saw the resentment at her mother's coarse attack burning in Irene's dark blue eyes, and exclaimed, with peevish childishness:

"Mamma says you must have done something very bad, indeed, or you wouldn't have thrown yourself into the water! She says you are a bad, wicked girl, and that I musn't entertain you

in my pretty saloon, so I guess you had better go back to Mrs. Leslie, and let me have my lounge!"

Irene gazed at the child, almost petrified by her startling change from sweetness and affection to spite and rancour. She saw the mother's spirit flashing from the eyes of the child, and rising with a proud step, left the room without a word.

"Is he really my father," she asked herself, "and is that coarse woman the one who was thought better to bear his name than my angel-hearted mother? And that sickly, petted child—does she shed greater lustre on the proud name of Stuart than I would have done?"

She hastened to Mrs. Leslie's tiny apartment, and finding herself alone, threw herself down upon the white bed and burst into a torrent of bitter tears.

Mrs. Leslie entering more than an hour later found her there, still sobbing and weeping in a very abandonment of despair. She stooped down impulsively and kissed the pure, white brow.

"Do not mind Mrs. Stuart, my dear," she said consolingly. "She is a spiteful, jealous cat, and hates you for your fair, young face."

Irene looked up, startled. How had Mrs. Leslie learned so much?

"Oh, I have heard about her naughtiness to you just now," smiled the lady. "Do not grieve, Irene. I will be your friend. I am a wealthy widow, and have no one to please but myself. I have fallen in love with you, you mysterious little waif! You shall be

my *protege* if you will."

Seeing that Irene could not speak for tears, she slipped a little note into her hand.

"Dry your eyes and read that," she said. "It is my recommendation to your favor."

Irene obeyed her in surprise. It was a pencil scrawl, hastily done.

"My poor, unfortunate child," it ran, "owing to the hardness of my wife I am unable to take you into the bosom of my family, as I wished to do; but I am none the less interested in your welfare. You will be Mrs. Leslie's *protege*. She is one of my oldest friends, and will be like a sister to you, while you may always command me as your best friend. It will be necessary, perhaps, that you should assume some name in order to avoid censure and suspicion. The world is very hard and cold, as you may have learned ere now, and it is best to put every defense possible between you and its sneers. Let Mrs. Leslie assist you in the selection of a suitable name."

The hurried note closed abruptly with the name of Clarence Stuart. Irene raised her eyes wonderingly to the lady's face.

"Why does he take such an interest in me?" she asked.

"He saved your life, my dear, and you seem in some sort to belong to him. Besides, he is naturally one of the noblest and best of men. His heart is full of pity for the weak and helpless," said the lady, enthusiastically.

There was a moment's silence; then Mrs. Leslie said, kindly:

"What do you say, my dear—will you be my little sister, and let me care for you?"

"Yes, until I can act for myself," Irene answered, softly, and pressing her girlish lips gratefully upon the lady's small white hand.

CHAPTER XIX

Mrs. Leslie smoothed the girl's rippling golden curls tenderly.

"And the name?" she said. "Shall you not take Mr. Stuart's advice about that? It will be far—far better."

Irene was silent, warm blushes drifting over her fair, young face.

"Think," said the gentle lady, "there must surely be some name to which you have a legal right. Is there not, my dear?"

Deeper and warmer grew the blush on the fair, girlish face.

She had suddenly remembered Guy Kenmore, and the ceremony which Mr. Clavering had declared to be binding upon them.

"My name is Mrs. Kenmore," she said to herself, with a strange feeling trembling at her heart as she recalled the handsome man to whom she was bound.

Then a flash of pride usurped the thrill of almost unconscious tenderness.

"He did not wish for me to be his wife," she said to herself. "I remember he regarded me simply as a spoiled child. I shall not claim his name, shall never trouble him more. He shall think me dead."

She looked up gravely at her kind friend.

"Mrs. Leslie," she said, "there is no name from out my past that I wish to claim. I have severed myself violently from all that

once bound me. I have done no wrong, I have sinned no sin, but I have been terribly wronged and sinned against. It is true I have borne a name in the world where I used to move, but when I found it was not mine I flung it away. I will not be called by it, I will have nothing to remind me of the past. Now tell me what I shall do."

Mrs. Leslie was silent a few moments. She wondered who had been so cruel as to wrong this beautiful girl, whose words, whose looks, whose every action was so pure and high-toned.

After a moment's reflection she said:

"My maiden name was Berlin; will you bear that, Irene?"

"You would give your own name to me, an utter stranger?" Irene cried, in grateful surprise.

"Yes, because, as I said just now, I have fallen in love with you. Whatever may be the sad secret of your past I can look into your eyes and see that you are pure and good. The name of Berlin is an old and honorable one, but I do not believe you would disgrace it in the bearing," said the sweet lady, heartily.

"Then I accept the loan of it with sincerest gratitude," replied Irene, through springing tears.

"Then you shall be called Irene Berlin," said Mrs. Leslie. "It is a pretty name, and will suit you. And now we will discuss other affairs. I am going to Italy with the Stuarts. Shall you be willing to go with me?"

"Nothing could please me better than to leave my native land behind me," replied the girl.

"That is settled, then. And now do you feel well enough to go on deck with me? It is a lovely day. The sun is shining softly and brightly. The sea is almost as calm and blue as the sky. The fresh air will do you a world of good."

"I have nothing to wear," said Irene, flushing deeply.

"That is true," laughed Mrs. Leslie. "The party dress in which you came among us is not exactly a yacht costume. But I can remedy that defect, I think, from my own wardrobe. Fortunately we are about the same size."

She brought out from her trunk a dark blue velvet suit and a cap of the same with a jaunty bird's wing on one side. Nothing could have become Irene better. The suit fitted to a charm, and when Mrs. Leslie set the jaunty cap on the streaming curls she exclaimed in wonder at the dazzling loveliness of her *protege*.

"It is no wonder Mrs. Stuart was jealous of you, you are the loveliest creature I ever saw," she exclaimed frankly.

"If I were not so unhappy you would make me vain, Mrs. Leslie," sighed the lovely girl.

"You are too young to be unhappy, my dear. I hope you will soon forget your sorrows. But come, let us go on deck and I will introduce you to your *Compagnons du Voyage*."

They went out and Irene's eyes were dazzled with the beauty of the day. The sky was deeply blue, with little white clouds sailing over it. The sun shone on the blue waves, and white-winged sea-gulls darted here and there. Several ladies and gentlemen were on deck, walking and chatting. They started in surprise—

the women envious—the men admiring—at the new comer. She looked like a young princess. Her step was light and proud, her bearing calm and self-possessed. The sun shone on her golden curls, her fair face and her velvet blue eyes, making her look like a perfect picture. Several gentlemen came around Mrs. Leslie, waiting eagerly for an introduction.

CHAPTER XX

Lilia Stuart had not failed to repeat Irene's confession of her namelessness to her mother. Mrs. Stuart, with the malice of a little mind, industriously disseminated the news among her guests. Curiosity and excitement were rife, regarding the mysterious waif from the sea.

So when Irene came upon deck, looking so wondrously lovely in the blue velvet dress and her rippling, waving, golden curls, they all came around her, full of wonder and surprise. They were amazed and disconcerted when Mrs. Leslie, with the cool self-possession that never deserted her under any circumstances, proceeded to introduce her *protege* by the name of Miss Berlin.

"Why, we thought she had no name—that she was a child of shame. Mrs. Stuart certainly said so," the ladies exclaimed to each other in whispers. "Depend upon it there is something wrong. We will be very shy of having anything to do with her."

If Irene had been homely and stupid, they might have pitied her, but her girlish beauty and grace at once enlisted the spite and envy of their little minds. Mrs. Leslie was the only lady on board who did not wish that she had perished in the cold waves. They regarded her as an interloper and unwelcome burden on them.

The gentlemen took a different view of the matter from their feminine friends. They were full of wonder and admiration over the beautiful stranger.

There were three gentlemen beside Mr. Stuart, on board the yacht, as there were three ladies. With two of these men our story has no interest. The third one, who was a distant relative of Mr. Stuart, and who at once fell desperately in love with our heroine, we will slightly describe.

He was tall and slight, with very dark eyes and hair, and a face that though weak and irresolute in expression, was rather handsome, having an effeminate mouth and chin that lent sweetness to his ever-ready smile. His dark eyes had a trick of falling beneath your glance, as if some inner consciousness made him shrink from meeting you with an open, steady gaze. In dress and manner he was rather a dandy, and was counted popular among the fair sex for his obliging disposition, and also a very fair tenor voice, with which he accompanied himself on the guitar. He answered to the name of Julius Revington.

On the heart of this handsome ladies'-man, the fair, blonde loveliness of Irene at once committed terrible havoc.

He gazed as if fascinated, on that arch, bright face to which the delicate color mounted in a roseate glow at his ardent gaze.

Mrs. Leslie smiled as she saw how deeply he was smitten with her *protege's* charms, and immediately introduced him.

He acknowledged the introduction with delight, and invited Miss Berlin to promenade the deck with his arm for support.

As Irene gently declined, pleading weariness for excuse, he brought her a comfortable chair and stood beside her ostensibly to shade her face from the too ardent kisses of the wind and sun,

but really that he might feast his eyes on her fresh and pearl-fair beauty. Revington holding his umbrella over Irene provoked some mirth and more envy in the breasts of Brown and Jones. The ladies were unanimously disgusted. It was too bad that she should wile Revington from them. Miss Smith, a tall brunette who rather regarded him as her own prey, looked daggers. Mrs. Leslie was secretly amused and delighted. She knew that Mrs. Stuart had been forming a coalition against Irene, and it pleased her to see how hard they took Revington's desertion to the banner of the newcomer.

But rave as they would, Irene's conquest was potent to everyone but herself. She who had never had a lover in the course of her brief, secluded life, was innocent of coquetry and unversed in the arts of love. She accepted Revington's attentions kindly, and congratulated herself that she had won another friend.

But though she was patient and gentle the beau could not congratulate himself on any rapid progress in her favor. She was strangely sad and grave. The red lips had no smiles for him though they answered him gently when he spoke. The blue eyes did not look at him, though he tried all his arts to win them to meet his gaze. They wandered strainingly across the sea, as if seeking something lost to sight. The lids, with their heavy golden lashes, had a pathetic droop as if unshed tears weighed them down. The lips quivered now and then as if with mute sobs. A story was written on her face—a story of sorrow and pain that clouded somewhat its spring time loveliness as clouds overshade

an April sky. Revington, who was poetical, thought of some applicable lines, and bending over her softly repeated them:

"It is raining, little flower;
Be glad of rain–
Too much sun would wither thee–
'Twill shine again.
The clouds are very black, 'tis true,
But just behind them shines the blue.

"Art thou weary, tender heart?
Be glad of pain–
In sorrow sweetest things will grow,
As flowers in rain.
God watches and thou wilt have sun
When clouds their perfect work have done."

The sweet words touched her. She had not known before that the sorrow at her heart was reflected on her face. She looked at him then a little wistfully.

"Do I indeed look so sad?" she asked.

"Far too sad for one so young," he answered. "I wish I could teach you to smile."

She did smile then, but the smile was sadder than tears.

"Ah, you should have known me even a week ago," she said, impulsively. "I had never known a real sorrow then. But now, unless I could forget, I do not think I could ever again be glad."

She thought of the old gray head that she had so loved lying

low in the dark grave; of Elaine, her mother, who had left her to perish in the dark waves after she had followed her almost to the brink, and a fountain of sorrow, of bitterness, and of shame welled up within her heart.

Revington looking keenly at her, wondered what the sorrow had been that had shadowed her brow and heart.

"I will find it out if I can," he said to himself, "and I will teach her to forget if I can."

He little dreamed how vain a task he had set himself. As the summer days glided softly past, and the white-sailed yacht flew over the blue ocean waves blithely as a bird, Irene began to understand the drift of his attentions.

"Revington is making love to you, my dear," Mrs. Leslie had said, laughing, and thus her young eyes were opened.

It amused her at first, and then she became disgusted. It angered her to see the artful little traps he had set to surprise her secret from her—the secret of her hidden past. From a desire for flirtation at first he had glided into ardent love, and his longing to know the story of her past grew greater daily in accordance with the strength of his passion.

But Irene, from mere friendliness at first had turned to ice. She repelled his attentions now, instead of languidly enduring them. In her heart she contrasted the weakly, handsome face and shrinking eyes with one that was engraved on her memory as possessing of all manly beauty the most.

Mrs. Stuart looked on at the little by-play with coldly

disapproving eyes. She had begun with a jealous hatred of Irene, because her husband had saved her life. Her aversion never grew less. Indeed, the beauty, and grace, and romantic mystery that enfolded the girl, only added fuel to the flame of her wrath and jealousy. She knew, although she was chary of expressing it by word or sign, that Mr. Stuart took a great and almost painful interest in the object of her antipathy.

It vexed her when she saw Julius Revington losing his heart to the girl, but she never expostulated with him but once, although they were intimate friends. Then he spoke a few words that effectually silenced her, and she learned for the first time how his dark eyes could flash beneath their drooping lids. She let him alone after that, and contented herself with spiteful looks and sneering words behind his back.

In the balmy breezes and salty breath of the summer ocean, Lilia Stuart's insidious disease took a new and flattering turn. She had fewer ill-turns. Her thin cheeks rounded out with something like healthy plumpness. Her large eyes did not look so large in her childish face. She would have returned to her first enthusiastic admiration and friendship for Irene, but her mother maliciously fostered ill-will and contempt in her mind, and Irene was the recipient of many bitter impertinences from the misguided child, which she received with cold and disdainful scorn. Mrs. Leslie was the only friend she had who dared speak openly and kindly for her. All the rest of the party, except Julius Revington, were weakly dominated by Mrs. Stuart.

They reached Italian shores at last, and Arno was secured for the Stuarts and their guests. There was a short and sharp debate between Mr. Stuart and his wife, who objected to receive Irene as her guest. But the lady knew how far she could transgress against her husband's will, and she found she had reached the limit, and was forced to yield ungraciously to his desires.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.