

THE

Angel and the Demon:

A TALE.

BY T. S. ARTHUR.

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By T. S. ARTHUR.

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PREFACE

We think few mothers can read this volume without being struck with the great importance of care in regard to the dispositions and moral qualities of those into whose hands they place their children. There are sad disorders in society at the present time, and influences of a baleful character at work: above all things, let tender, innocent children be kept wholly beyond their sphere. In but rare cases should there be a delegation of the mother's duties: extreme ill health is, perhaps, the only excuse for such delegation; but when it is made, let the nurse or governess be of known pure life and firm integrity. There should be no guess-work here; no trusting of a stranger, unless under the amplest testimonials from known parties; for wrong done to childhood is, too often, wrong done for the whole life. But we can only hint here at what we have endeavored to illustrate in the present volume.

CONTENTS.

| | PAGE |
|--|------|
| CHAP. <u>I.</u> —THE YOUNG GOVERNESS | 9 |
| <u>II.</u> —GAINING INFLUENCE | 21 |
| <u>III.</u> —TRIALS | 32 |
| <u>IV.</u> —WORTH AND PRETENSION | 40 |
| <u>V.</u> —THE WIND AND THE SUN | 48 |
| <u>VI.</u> —THE GOVERNESS DISMISSED | 60 |
| <u>VII.</u> —A REVELATION | 71 |
| <u>VIII.</u> —THE NEW GOVERNESS | 82 |
| <u>IX.</u> —THE SHADOW OF EVIL | 91 |
| <u>X.</u> —A LITTLE BREEZE | 101 |
| <u>XI.</u> —THE DEMON UNVEILED | 108 |
| <u>XII.</u> —A FEARFUL MYSTERY | 119 |
| <u>XIII.</u> —DOUBT AND ANXIETY | 127 |
| <u>XIV.</u> —PAINFUL CONSEQUENCES | 138 |
| <u>XV.</u> —ALARMING OCCURRENCE | 150 |
| <u>XVI.</u> —DISAPPEARANCE OF MADELINE | 158 |
| <u>XVII.</u> —THE SEARCH | 165 |
| <u>XVIII.</u> —A NEST OF PSEUDO-SPIRITUALISTS | 189 |
| <u>XIX.</u> —THE BIRD AND THE SERPENT | 204 |
| <u>XX.</u> —THE RESCUE | 215 |
| <u>XXI.</u> —THE ARREST | 223 |
| <u>XXII.</u> —BREAKING THE SPELL | 236 |
| <u>XXIII.</u> —THE ANGEL STRONGER THAN THE DEMON | 245 |
| <u>XXIV.</u> —AN UNEXPECTED REVELATION | 269 |
| <u>XXV.</u> —A REVELATION | 278 |
| <u>XXVI.</u> —REVIEWING THE MATTER | 287 |
| <u>XXVII.</u> —GETTING RIGHT | 298 |
| <u>XXVIII.</u> —CONCLUSION | 304 |

THE
ANGEL AND THE DEMON.

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG GOVERNESS.

Mrs. Dainty's health was poor, and her nerves delicate. It was no use, she said: the wear and tear of body and mind were more than she could stand. She must have a governess for the children. Mr. Dainty never opposed his wife in any thing, and so replied,—

“Very well, Madeline. Find your governess.”

But Uncle John—Uncle Johns, by-the-way, if they happen to be on the mother's side, and old bachelors at that, are proverbially inclined to interfere with the home-management of their nieces—had, as usual, a word to say after he was alone with Mrs. Dainty.

“Don't have any thing of the kind,” said he. “Be governess to your own children.”

“But I'm not equal to the task. It will kill me. See how thin and pale I am getting; and my nerves are in a terrible condition.”

“No wonder.”

“Why?”

“Dissipation will destroy any woman's nerves.”

“Dissipation! Why, Uncle John!”

“How many nights were you out last week?”

“Only three.”

“Only three! and each time until long after midnight. Dancing, late hours, hot suppers, and confectionery! No wonder your nerves are shattered! Such a life would kill me up in half a year.”

“Well, in my case, it is all that keeps me going. These social recreations, coming at intervals upon the enervating cares of domestic life, give new vitality to the exhausted system.”

“Filigree and nonsense!” replied Uncle John, impatiently. “You know better than to talk after this fashion.”

And so, for the time, the debate closed between them.

Meeting with no opposition from her husband, Mrs. Dainty proceeded at once to the work of procuring a governess. Among her fashionable friends she first made inquiry, but in no direction could she hear of the right individual. The qualifications were set forth at large. She must speak French with the true Parisian accent, and be able to teach that language; her knowledge of music must be thorough; she must be perfect in drawing and painting; her manners must be ladylike, her tastes refined: in a word, she must possess all the high accomplishments necessary to educate the children of a fashionable mother who was “in society.” She would greatly prefer a Frenchwoman.

At last she heard of a “French lady,” the daughter of a French count of the old régime, who was desirous of procuring the situation of governess in a family of “good standing.” An interview with this lady was held in the presence of Uncle John, who took occasion to ask her some questions about Paris, where he had spent several years. The stately manner and superior air which she assumed at the commencement of the interview gradually gave way under these questions, until madame showed considerable embarrassment.

“Your face is very familiar to me,” said Uncle John, finally. “I am sure I must have met you in Paris.”

“Monsieur is undoubtedly mistaken,” said the lady, with returning dignity.

“Perhaps so,” replied Uncle John. Then, in a more serious voice, he added, “But one thing is certain: you do not possess the qualifications desired in the governess of my nieces.”

The “French lady” offered no remonstrance, and asked for no explanations, but, with a flushed face, arose and retired.

“Better keep clear of counts’ daughters,” said Uncle John, as the applicant withdrew. “If you will have a governess for the children, procure one born and bred so near at home that you can readily learn all about her.”

Mrs. Dainty, who was particularly attracted by the appearance of the French lady, was not altogether pleased with Uncle John’s summary mode of despatching her, though a little startled at the idea of getting an impostor in her house.

What next was to be done? “Suppose we advertise?” said Mrs. Dainty.

“And have your bell-wire broken before ten o’clock the next morning,” replied Uncle John. “Take my advice, and wait a few days.”

“What good will waiting do? Unless we take some steps in the direction we wish to go, we shall never arrive at the end of our journey.”

“Good steps have been taken,” said Uncle John, cheerfully. “You have already made known to quite a number of your friends that you want a governess. The fact will not die; many will remember and speak of it, and somebody will happen to think of somebody who will just suit you.”

So Mrs. Dainty concluded to wait a few days, and see what time would bring forth.

On the third morning after the interview with the French count’s daughter, as Mr. and Mrs. Dainty and Uncle John sat talking together on the governess-question, the waiter opened the door, and said that a young woman wished to speak with Mrs. Dainty.

“Who is she, and what does she want?” inquired Mrs. Dainty, with an air of indifference, stroking the head of her King Charles spaniel, which, instead of her baby, occupied a comfortable position in her lap.

The servant went down to gain what information he could from the visitor touching her business with Mrs. Dainty, and returned with the information that she was an applicant for the situation of governess in the family, having been informed that the lady wanted a person in that capacity.

“Tell her to come up,” said Mrs. Dainty. “I wonder who she can be?” was added, as the servant withdrew.

Uncle John sat with his chin resting on the head of his cane, apparently so much engaged with his own thoughts as to be unconscious of what was passing.

In a few minutes the door reopened, and a young woman in plain attire, and of modest, almost timid aspect, entered. Mr. Dainty was standing with his back to the fire; Mrs. Dainty sat in her morning wrapper, with the King Charles spaniel still in comfortable quarters; and Uncle John remained in the same position, not stirring as the girl entered.

“Take a chair,” said Mrs. Dainty, with that supercilious indifference which imagined superiority often puts on toward imagined inferiors.

The girl flushed, trembled, and sat down, letting her eyes fall to the floor.

“What is your name?” asked Mrs. Dainty.

“Florence Harper,” replied the girl.

“Where do you live?”

“At No. — Elwood Street.”

“With whom?”

“My aunt.”

“Are your father and mother living?”

“No, ma’am.” Even Mrs. Dainty felt the sadness with which this reply was made.

“I am in want of a governess for my children,” said Mrs. Dainty, coldly; “but I hardly think you will suit.”

The young girl arose at once.

“Sit down.” Mrs. Dainty spoke with a slight impatience. The visitor resumed her chair, while Mr. Dainty kept his place before the fire, with his

eyes fixed upon her curiously.

“Do you speak French?” inquired Mrs. Dainty.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“What French school did you attend?”

“I was with Mr. Picot for six years.”

“Indeed!” There was a new interest in Mrs. Dainty’s voice.

“How is it in regard to your musical qualifications?” she continued.

“I will satisfy you, madam,” said the applicant, in a quiet but firm and dignified manner, “in regard to my ability to teach the various branches of a polite education, by references, if you desire them.”

“Oh, certainly! I shall expect references, of course. You don’t imagine that I would take an entire stranger into my house without the most rigid inquiries touching her character?”

Miss Harper arose.

“Do you wish,” said she, “to make any inquiries about me? Or have you concluded that I will not suit you?”

“You can leave your references,” replied Mrs. Dainty.

The names of two ladies were given. Mrs. Dainty had no acquaintance with them, but she knew their standing.

“That will do,” she replied.

“Shall I call again, or will you send me word if you desire to see me,” said the young girl.

“You may call.” Mrs. Dainty spoke in a very indifferent manner.

The visitor retired.

“I don’t like her,” said Mrs. Dainty.

“Why not?” inquired Uncle John, lifting, for the first time, his chin from the head of his cane.

“Too plebeian,” said Mrs. Dainty.

“Nothing but a countess will do for your young hopefuls,” retorted Uncle John. “Plebeian! There is the air of a lady in every movement. Take my advice, and learn all you can about her; and I’m mistaken if you don’t at once secure her services.”

Mrs. Dainty’s heart was set on having a governess; and, as no better opportunity offered for procuring one, she made inquiries about Miss Harper, and received encouraging information. A family council, consisting of herself, husband, and Uncle John, decided in the affirmative on the question of engaging the young lady, who, as she did not return to know whether her services would be desired or not, was sent for. Terms, duties, and the like being discussed and settled, Miss Harper, with many misgivings and strong reluctance, assumed the difficult and responsible position of governess in the family of Mrs. Dainty.

Three children were placed under her care: Agnes, the eldest daughter, now in her fourteenth year; Madeline, the second, eleven years old; and George, in his sixth summer. Many unwise remarks had been made about the young girl in the presence of the children; and when she assumed, formally, the charge of them, she perceived at a glance that they held her in contempt, and were not in the least inclined to obey her authority.

The first day’s trials were severe enough. Mrs. Dainty, in whose mind there was a foregone conclusion adverse to the young governess, made it her business to be present with her for some hours while giving her introductory lessons to the children, or, rather, while making her first efforts to dive into their minds and see what had already been stored away. The mother did not act very wisely during the time; for she was not a very wise woman. Could she have seen the image of herself as it was pictured in the mind of Miss Harper, she would not have felt very much flattered. A small portion of light entered the region of perception once or twice, the way being opened by a quiet answer to some remark that broadly displayed her ignorance. One result followed this rather meddlesome interference on the

part of Mrs. Dainty. Her respect for the young governess was materially heightened.

On the second day, Miss Harper was left in the undisturbed charge of her young pupils, and she had a better opportunity for studying their natures. Agnes, the oldest, she found to be indolent, proud, and quite ready to imitate the example of her mother in disrespectful conduct toward herself. Madeline was of a gentler, more loving, and more obedient disposition; while George was a rude, well-spoiled specimen of a boy who showed no inclination whatever to come under even the mildest discipline.

“She’ll never do any thing with them,” said Mrs. Dainty, in a confident manner, as she sat alone with her husband and Uncle John, on the evening of the first day, and talked over the new arrangement.

“Why do you think so?” asked Uncle John.

“She’s too young and inexperienced. She hasn’t character enough. Agnes is almost as much of a woman as she is.”

“Don’t be too sure of that,” said Uncle John.

“Agnes will have to live very fast if she ever overtakes Miss Harper.”

“She’s rather an indifferent-looking personage,” remarked Mr. Dainty, in a careless way, “and hasn’t stuff enough in her for the management of three such spirited children as ours.”

Uncle John smiled.

“You are quite taken with her,” said his niece.

“I haven’t had much time for observation,” replied Uncle John; “but the little I have seen impresses me favorably. Beneath that modest, quiet, almost timid exterior, there lies, if I am not mistaken, far more reserved power than you imagine. Give her a fair chance, second her efforts in every attempt she makes to bring the children into order and subordination, and particularly refrain from the slightest word in their presence that will lower her in their respectful regard.”

Mrs. Dainty saw, from the last remark, that she had erred in a very thoughtless way; and her cheeks burned a little when Uncle John added,—

“I have heard something of Miss Harper’s history from a lady friend, who represents her as a very superior girl, and says that she was raised in a circle of refined and highly-intelligent people.”

“Oh, well, we can give her a trial. Perhaps she will do,” replied Mrs. Dainty, in a languid manner. “I’m glad she has been raised among refined people. My greatest fear was that she would impart vulgar manners to the children.”

“I don’t think she can do them any harm.” Uncle John spoke a little ironically.

“I hope not,” said Mrs. Dainty, seriously; and the subject, not taking a turn that was agreeable to her, dropped of its own weight.

We shall see, in another chapter, some of the results of this new arrangement in the home of the fashionable mother.

CHAPTER II. GAINING INFLUENCE.

Having procured a governess for the children,—even if she were not all that was expected in the individual who was to fill so important a place,—our fashionable mother felt a weight of care removed from her shoulders. She could now go out when she pleased, and stay as long as she pleased, and not suffer from the troublesome consciousness that she was neglecting her children,—a species of dereliction that never escaped the watchful eyes of Uncle John, who had no hesitation about speaking plainly.

Miss Harper's experiences with the children on the first and second days were not very encouraging; and this was particularly so in the case of Agnes, whose conduct toward her was exceedingly offensive.

On the third morning, this young lady positively refused to give her French recitation at the time required by Miss Harper, declaring that it was her wish to take a music-lesson. She had overheard her mother and Uncle John conversing on the subject of Miss Harper's authority over the children, on which occasion Mrs. Dainty had said,—

“I will have no iron rule with Agnes. Miss Harper must treat her with that respectful consideration to which a young lady in her position is entitled. There must be no petty domineering; no ordering with upstart authority; no laying down of law.”

“Do you expect to be always present with Miss Harper in the school-room?” Uncle John asked quietly, as if he was really in earnest.

“Of course not! What a preposterous idea!” replied Mrs. Dainty.

“Then Miss Harper must have authority in your absence.” Uncle John spoke very decidedly.

“Agnes will never submit to any authority from her.”

“Why not from *her*, pray?”

“Because Agnes has reached an age when she can comprehend the wide difference between their respective stations. She is almost a young lady.”

“You are a weak woman, Madeline,” said Uncle John,—“a very weak woman, and I am almost out of patience with you. Now, do you wish to know, plainly, how I regard this matter?”

“Not particularly.” Mrs. Dainty gaped as she spoke.

“You shall know, for all your well-bred indifference,” said Uncle John, a little sharply. “In my opinion, Miss Harper is in every way the superior to Agnes, and, if I am not vastly mistaken, will in a few years be recognised, in society, as superior.”

“Society!” Mrs. Dainty curled her lip. “What do you mean by society?”

“Something more perhaps than you mean,” was answered. “Men and women recognised by common consent as superior to the mass.”

“Well, you can talk as you please, and think as you please, Uncle John; but I’m not going to have Agnes domineered over by this plebeian girl, and if she attempt any thing of the kind, she will get her immediate dismissal.”

All of this was heard by Agnes, who very naturally made up her mind to be the director of her own studies in the absence of her mother.

“I wish to take my music-lesson now,” she said, when the governess asked for her French recitation.

“From twelve to one is the hour for music,” replied Miss Harper, mildly, yet firmly, fixing her eye steadily upon the eye of Agnes. There was something in the expression of that eye which the young lady had never seen before, and which held her by a kind of fascination. It was not anger, nor rebuke, nor sternness, but the quiet power of a superior mind over that of an inferior. Agnes tried to withdraw her gaze, but it seemed impossible to do so. A strange feeling of respect, almost awe came stealing into her heart and repressing her dominant selfhood. When Miss Harper withdrew her steady gaze, Agnes almost caught her breath, so marked was the sense of relief that followed.

“Madeline dear,” said Miss Harper, in a cheerful, pleasant voice, speaking to the younger sister, “shall I hear you read now?”

Madeline came smiling to her side, and, lifting her book to her face, read the lesson which had been given to her.

“Very well done! You are improving already.” Miss Harper spoke so encouragingly that Madeline looked up into her kind face, and said, without thinking of the place and the occasion, “Thank you!” The young governess had already opened a way into her heart.

“Now, Agnes,” said Miss Harper, “if you are ready with your French lesson, I will hear it.” She spoke kindly and cheerfully, fixing her eyes at the same time steadily upon her, and with the same look of quiet power which had subdued her a little while before.

“I would rather take my music-lesson first.” Agnes could not yield without a show of resistance. Something was due to pride.

“The hours of study were fixed in consultation with your mother,” said Miss Harper, mildly; “and it is my duty as well as yours to act in conformity therewith.”

“Oh, mother won’t care!” Agnes spoke with animation. “If I prefer this hour to twelve it will be all the same to her.”

“Your mother don’t care for her word, Agnes?” Miss Harper spoke in a tone of surprise.

“I didn’t mean that,” was answered, with some little confusion of manner. “I only meant that if she knew I preferred one time to another she would not hesitate to gratify my wishes.”

“Very well. We will consult her this evening,” said Miss Harper. “And if she consents to a new arrangement of the study-hours I will make no objection. But at present both you and I are bound to observe existing rules. I have no power to change them if I would. So, come up to the line cheerfully, to-day, and to-morrow we will both be governed by your mother’s decision.”

Agnes was subdued. Without a sign of hesitation she went on with her lesson in French, and said it all the better for this little contention, through which she came with an entirely new impression of Miss Harper.

When the young teacher came to George, this little reprobate would do nothing that was required of him. His book he had, from the commencement of the school-hours, refused to open; replying to every request of Miss Harper to do so with a sullen, "A'n't a-going to."

"Now, George, you will say your lesson," said Miss Harper, in a pleasant tone.

"A'n't a-going to," replied the little fellow, pouting out his lips, and scowling from beneath his knit brows.

"Oh, yes; George will say his lesson."

"A'n't a-going to."

"Oh, yes, Georgie," said Agnes, now coming to the aid of Miss Harper. "Say your lesson."

"A'n't a-going to." His lips stuck out farther, and his brow came lower over his eyes.

"Come, Georgie, do say your lesson," urged Agnes.

"A'n't a-going to." The resolute will of the child had no other expression.

"I'll tell mother," said Agnes.

"Don't care! Tell her! You wouldn't say *your* lesson."

"Oh, yes, Georgie, Agnes did say her lesson like a good girl; and so did Madeline." Miss Harper showed not the least excitement. Her voice was calm and her manner even. "Now say yours."

"A'n't a-going to." The persistent little rebel had no idea of capitulation.

"I knew a little boy once——"

There was such a pleasant, story-telling tone in the voice of Miss Harper that George was betrayed into looking up into her face, when she fixed his eye as she had, not long before, fixed the eye of his self-willed sister.

“I knew a little boy once,” she repeated, “who had no mother. Before he was as old as you are now, his mother died and went to heaven. Poor, dear little fellow! it was a sad day for him when his good mother died and left him to the care of strangers.”

George was all attention. Already the unpleasant lines of frowning disobedience were fading from his childish countenance, and a gentle, earnest look coming into his eyes.

“After this little boy’s mother died,” went on the governess, “there was nobody in the house to love him as she had done. His father was absent all day, and very often did not get home in the evening until poor little Willy was fast asleep in bed. As it would not do to leave Willy alone with the cook and chambermaid, his father got a governess, who was to have the care of him and teach him all his lessons. Now, it so happened that this governess was not kind and good as Willy’s mother had been, but was selfish and cruel. She gave him long, hard lessons, and if he did not get them—which he often could not—would punish him cruelly; sometimes by shutting him up in a dark closet, sometimes by making him go without eating, and sometimes by whipping him. And all the while she managed to make Willy’s father believe that she was kind and good to him.

“Poor little Willy! He grew pale and sad-looking, and no wonder. I was at the house one day——”

“Oh, Miss Harper! Did you know him?” said George, with a countenance full of interest.

“Yes, dear, I knew little Willy; and I knew his mother before she died. As I was just saying, I called one day at the house, a few months after his mother was taken away from him; and, as the servant opened the door for me, I heard the voice of Willy, and he was crying bitterly. All at once the voice was hushed to a low, smothered sound.

““What is the matter with Willy?” I asked; and the servant answered that she supposed the governess was putting him into the dark closet again. In

an instant there seemed to stand before me the child's dead mother, and she pointed upward with her finger. I did not stop to think, but ran up-stairs into the nursery, where I found the governess sitting by the window with a book in her hand.

“‘Where's Willy?’ I demanded. She started, and looked very much surprised and a little angry. But I was in earnest.

“‘Where's Willy?’ I repeated my question more sternly. As she did not stir, I went quickly across the room and opened a closet door, which I found locked, with the key on the outside. There, lying on his face, was the dear child. I took him up in my arms and turned his face to the light. It was pale as marble. I thought he was dead.

“‘Bring me some water,’ I called, in a loud, quick voice. The frightened governess fled from the room, but soon returned with water. I threw it into the dear child's face, and rubbed his hands and feet. In a few minutes, he began to breathe.

“‘Give him to me, now,’ said the governess, endeavoring to lift him from my arms. But I said, ‘No; cruel woman!’ She looked angry, but I was not moved. ‘Untie my bonnet-strings,’ I spoke to the chambermaid; and the girl took off my bonnet.

“‘Jenny,’ said I to the chambermaid,—I knew her name,—‘Jenny, I want you to go for Willy's father.’

“‘Jenny did not hesitate a minute. ‘There's no use in sending for his father,’ said the governess. But we didn't mind what she said. When Willy's father came, she was gone. He was very much distressed when he saw his dear little boy, and very angry when I told him about the dark closet. After that I became Willy's nurse and teacher. But he did not stay with us very long. The angels came for him one lovely summer evening, and bore him up to the heavenly land; and he is now happy again with his mother.’”

Tears came into the eyes of all the children when Florence Harper ceased speaking. She had found the way to their hearts, and, not only this, had lifted for them just so much of the veil that concealed her true character as to let them see enough to win something of love and something of respectful consideration.

The book was still in the hand of George, and, as he let his eyes fall from the face of Miss Harper, they rested on the open page. Nothing was said by the latter. A few moments of silence passed, and then George, in a low but rather earnest voice, said over his lesson.

The young governess had conquered.

CHAPTER III.

TRIALS.

It was late when Mrs. Dainty came home. Her husband had already arrived, and was waiting for his dinner. George and Madeline, pleased as children usually are when the visiting mother returns from her recreations, crowded around her with their questions and complaints, and annoyed and hindered her to a degree that broke down her small stock of patience.

“Miss Harper!” she called, in a fretful voice, going to her chamber-door.

The governess heard, and answered from her room, leaving it at the same time, and coming down toward the chamber of Mrs. Dainty.

“Call those children away!” said the mother, sharply. “And see here! When I come home next time, don’t let them beset me like so many hungry wolves. I’ve hired you to take the care of them, and I want the care taken. That’s your business.”

Mrs. Dainty was annoyed and angry; and she looked her real character for the time. She was a superior, commanding an inferior, with a complete consciousness of the gulf that stretched between them. Her manner, even more than her words, was offensive to the young governess, whose native independence and self-respect impelled her at once to resign her position and leave the house.

“George; Madeline.” She spoke quietly,—almost indifferently.

“Why don’t you call them as if you had some life in you?” exclaimed Mrs. Dainty, losing all patience.

Miss Harper turned away without a word, and went up-stairs, intending to put on her bonnet and leave the house. Near her room-door she met Uncle John, who had overheard the offensive language of his niece. He saw that the young girl’s face wore an indignant flush, and that both lips and eyes indicated a settled purpose.

“What are you going to do?” he asked, letting her see by look and tone that he understood her feelings.

“I am going away from here,” she replied, firmly.

“You must not do it,” said Uncle John.

“Self-respect will not permit me to remain,” answered Florence.

“Feeling must yield to duty, my dear young lady,” said Uncle John, with an earnestness that showed how much he was interested.

“My duty is not here,” was the slowly-spoken answer.

“Our duty is where we can do the most good. I know something of your morning’s trials and wise discipline. You have done nobly, Florence,—nobly. There is good in these children, and you must bring it forth to the light.”

“I am but human,” said Florence, with a quivering lip.

“You are gold in the crucible,” replied Uncle John. “The fire may be very hot, my dear young friend; but it will leave no mark upon your real character. It is not every spirit that has a quality pure enough to meet life’s higher ordeals. No, no: shrink not from the trials in your way. The lions are chained, and can only growl and shake at you their terrible manes. Go back for the children. For their sakes, draw them to yourself with the singular power you possess. Be to them all their mother fails to be. And always regard me as your friend and advocate.”

Uncle John left her and went back to his own room. A few moments Florence stood irresolute. Then, stepping to the head of the stairs, she called to George, who was pounding at his mother’s door. Mrs. Dainty had re-entered her chamber and locked it against the children. The child did not heed her in the least. Going down to him, and taking his hand, which the stubborn little fellow tried to prevent her from doing, she said, in a voice that was very kind, and in a tone full of interest,—

“George, dear, did I ever show you my book of pictures?”

Instantly the firm, resisting hand lay passively in hers; though he neither looked up nor answered.

“It is full of the sweetest pictures you ever saw,—birds, and sheep, and horses; children playing in the woods; and ducks and geese swimming in the water.”

“Won’t you show them to me?” said the child, turning to his young teacher, and half forgetting, already, in the pleasing images she had created in his thoughts, his angry disappointment in being thrust from his mother’s room.

“Yes; and you shall look at them just as long as you please,” answered Florence.

Madeline had thrown herself upon the passage-floor in a stubborn fit. Her mother’s discipline in the case, if the child had remained there until she came from her chamber, would have been to jerk her up passionately, and, while passion remained in the rapidly-acquired ascendant, inflict upon her from two to half a dozen blows with her hand. Wild, angry screams would have followed; and then the repentant mother would have soothed her child with promised favors.

“Madeline must see them also,” said Miss Harper, pausing and stooping over the unhappy little girl. “Don’t you want to see my picture scrap-book?” She spoke very cheerfully.

“Oh, yes, Madeline! Do come! Miss Harper is going to show us a book full of such beautiful pictures.”

The voice of George went home. Madeline arose to her feet. Taking, each, a hand of their governess, the two children went with light feet up to her room, and in her book of pictures soon lost all marks of their recent unhappy disturbance.

Mrs. Dainty appeared at the dinner-table in a bad humor, and commenced scolding about the new governess.

“She’ll have to do better than this, before I am suited with her,” she said, captiously.

“What’s the matter now?” asked Mr. Dainty, in a manner that exhibited some annoyance.

“Matter!” replied his wife. “I guess you’d think it was some matter, if, when you came in late, tired and hungry, the whole body of children were to hover around you with their thousand wants and complaints. It’s Miss Harper’s business to keep them out of the way. She’s paid for doing it. I had to call her down from her room, and when I spoke to her sharply she turned herself from me with an air of offended dignity that was perfectly ridiculous. The upstart! I shall have it out with her this afternoon. No domestic shall treat me with even a shadow of disrespect. I scarcely think she comprehends her true position in the family; but I will enlighten her fully.”

The children listened with wide open ears, from Agnes down to George. Mr. Dainty made no response, and Uncle John merely remarked, “I hope you will think twice before you act once in this business of defining Miss Harper’s position and making yourself clearly understood. My advice is, to be very sure that you understand yourself first.”

There was nothing to offend in the manner of Uncle John. He spoke in sober earnest.

“Mother,” said Agnes, breaking in through the pause that followed Uncle John’s remark, “did you say that I should take my French lesson first?”

“No: who said that I did?” Mrs. Dainty answered, without a moment’s reflection.

“Why, Miss Harper said so, and made me give my French recitation before I was ready for it.”

“I said no such thing.” Mrs. Dainty spoke with some indignation, born of a vague notion, from what Agnes had said, that the young governess was assuming arbitrary rule over the children, and falsely quoting her as authority. “I said no such thing! What does she mean by it?”

“Well, she said you did, and made me say a lesson before I had half learned it. That’s not the way to do!”

“Oh, dear!” exclaimed Mrs. Dainty. “Here comes the trouble I feared! Give these vulgar people a position a little in advance of what they have been used to, and forthwith they take on airs. I saw it in the girl at the first interview. I knew then that she wouldn’t suit, and if my judgment hadn’t been overruled she never would have come into the house.”

Mrs. Dainty glanced toward meddlesome Uncle John as she said this. But Uncle John did not seem to be in the least disturbed.

“Agnes,” said he, looking across the table at the injured and complaining girl, “what lesson did you propose to recite in place of your French?”

Agnes flushed a little as she answered,—

“My music-lesson.”

“Ah! That was the substitute. What about it?” And Uncle John turned his quiet eyes upon the countenance of his niece. “If I am not mistaken, I heard you tell Miss Harper that you thought the hour from twelve to one the best for music.”

“Maybe I did,” answered Mrs. Dainty, pettishly; “but I didn’t fix it as a law more binding than the statutes of the Medes and Persians. Something was left to the girl’s own discretion.”

“And I think it will be found on examination,” said Uncle John, “that she used the discretion wisely.”

“Oh, but she said”—Agnes had taken her cue from her mother—“that the hours for study had positively been fixed by mother, and that she had no authority to vary them in the least.”

“Preposterous!” ejaculated Mrs. Dainty.

“What’s the news to-day?” said Uncle John, turning to Mr. Dainty. “Any thing of importance stirring in the city?”

He wished to change a subject the discussion of which could do nothing but harm among the children.

The answer of Mr. Dainty led the conversation into an entirely new channel. Once or twice, during the dinner-hour, Mrs. Dainty tried to renew her complaints against the governess; but Uncle John managed to throw her off, and so the matter was dropped for the time.

CHAPTER IV. WORTH AND PRETENSION.

The manner in which Florence Harper met the insolence of Mrs. Dainty—we give her conduct its true designation—chafed that high-spirited lady exceedingly. She could neither forget nor forgive such conduct in an inferior. What right had she to exhibit an independent spirit?—to show a womanly pride that would not brook an outrage? The very thought made the hot blood leap along the veins of indignant Mrs. Dainty. Oh, yes. She would “have it out with her!” So, toward the middle of the afternoon, Florence was sent for, and she went down to the sitting-room where Mrs. Dainty was alone. Uncle John was on the alert. He had remained in his own apartment, listening, with the door ajar, for nearly an hour, and heard the summons given to Florence. He was in the sitting-room almost as soon as she was, and in time to prevent an interview, the result of which would, in all probability, be the withdrawal of Miss Harper from the family. His niece looked at him with a frown as he entered. An offensive interrogation was just on her tongue, but she repressed the words, substituting therefor this query:—

“When did we fix the hours of study for the children, Miss Harper?”

“On the day before yesterday, ma’am,” replied Florence, in a calm, respectful voice.

“I never had any thing to say to you on the subject!” Mrs. Dainty lost temper, and, of course, dignity and self-respect.

“Was not ten o’clock mentioned by you as the hour when it would be best to commence the lessons?” inquired Florence.

“If it was, that doesn’t mean fixing all the hours of study!”

“You said you wished Agnes to begin with French,” said Florence, quietly.

“Well, suppose I did: what then?”

“Only, that I understood you to mean that you wished her to let French constitute her first lesson as most important. You will, no doubt, remember that I approved this, as her mind would always come fresh to the study.”

“Approved!” Mrs. Dainty could not repress this manifestation of contempt.

“You will also remember, that you spoke of the hour from twelve to one as most suitable for music.”

Miss Harper looked at the excited lady with a steady gaze.

“And upon that you based a set of arbitrary rules, and tried to enforce them by representing me as their author!”

“No, madam, I did no such thing.” Florence drew her slender form up to its full height, and looked calmly, steadily, and with an air of dignified self-respect upon Mrs. Dainty. “I simply remained firm to my duty when Agnes wished to begin with music; and said to her, that the hours of study had been arranged in consultation with you, and that I had no authority to change them. So I understood the matter, and, in my action, simply regarded the good of your child. I did not, of course, permit my pupil to direct the plan of study, and only yielded a reference to you in order to make my firmness of purpose the less offensive to her pride. And you must forgive me, madam, for saying, that it is neither just to me nor your children thus to react upon my honest efforts to meet your wishes in regard to their studies, and serve at the same time their best interests as a teacher. I wish, for the sake of your children, you knew me better. As it is, if you desire me to remain their instructor, you must either fix the hours and subjects of study in so plain a way that no one can mistake them, or leave it altogether in my hands. In either case, I will guarantee submission on the part of the children.”

The outraged pride of Mrs. Dainty broke through the pressure of involuntary respect which the dignified, resolute, perfectly independent manner of the young teacher had inspired, and the word “Impertinent!” was on her lips, when Uncle John said,—

“Miss Harper is clearly right, and I am pleased to know that she has acted with so much firmness and so much prudence. She is entitled to praise, not blame.”

Mrs. Dainty waved her hand for the governess to leave the room. Without a word, or the slightest apparent hesitation, Miss Harper retired.

“Uncle John!” Mrs. Dainty turned angrily upon the old gentleman the moment they were alone, “I am out of all patience with you! What chance have I to command respect from inferiors in my house, if you step in to justify them to my face when I am attempting to blame improper actions? It’s an outrage, and I won’t have it!”

“There is only one way to command the respect of your household, Madeline,” replied Uncle John, “and that is, to treat them with kindness and justice. You may demand respect from those whom you regard as your inferiors, forever; but, unless your actions toward them be marked with dignity and ladylike self-possession, your command will be no more heeded than was that of the old British king who commanded the waves of the sea to stop their advancing course. Respect or contempt is an independent thing, and always has free course. If a lady desires the first, she has to do something more than utter her proud behest. She has got to deserve it; and, if she fail in this, she will surely have the last,—contempt.”

“I don’t wish to hear any more of that,” replied Mrs. Dainty, curtly. “I hardly think it fair to seek a justification of your own conduct in turning around and assailing me. What right had you to approve Miss Harper’s conduct to her face, when I was blaming her?”

“The common right which every one has to drag another from the brink of a precipice over which he is about blindly casting himself. I have observed Miss Harper very closely since she has been in the house, and at times when she could not be aware of this observation. When you have been in the street, I have been at home, watching her deportment among the children; and it has always been kind, wise, and consistent. There has been no shadow of that domineering spirit of which you seem so nervously afraid, but always a firmness that knew just how far to yield, and how far to be immovable. I happened to hear all that passed in regard to the French and music lessons. Agnes was all to blame, and Florence was all right. It

was beautiful to see with what a gentle dignity Florence met the efforts of Agnes to be mistress instead of scholar, and how wisely she subdued the incipient lady's rebellious pride. She gave no offence in doing so, but really won upon her kind feelings; and, but for the opportunity given her pride to speak out its mortification, you would never have heard a word of complaint.

“You will thus understand,” continued Uncle John, “why I threw in a word of justification in time to prevent the utterance of language on your part, which would inevitably have resulted in the loss of a governess for your children who has already gained more power over them for good than any other being in the world possesses. And now, Madeline, let me warn you against any further exhibitions of passion, pride, or contempt toward one into whose hands you have committed the well-being of your children. Seek to elevate, not depress her. Treat her with respect and consideration, and your children will do the same. You make her the guide, counsellor, and companion of your children. Think of the vast influence she must exercise over them! The work of forming their young minds—of directing their characters—is in her hands, not yours. The mother's high prerogative you choose to delegate to one regarded as an inferior. Happily, in this case, the choice of a representative has not been foolishly made. In all respects Miss Harper is qualified for her position, and, if sustained in it, will act her part nobly. She is no common person, let me tell you, but one of superior mind, high moral worth, and almost perfect accomplishments,—in a word, a model for your children! But she is, at the same time, a young woman with too much self-respect to bear your haughty, insulting manners. If you wish to keep her, therefore, you must not repeat the offences of to-day.”

“Does she expect me to curtsy every time I meet her, and to say, ‘If you please,’ and ‘By your leave, miss’?” The lips of Mrs. Dainty curled, and he looked very scornful.

“No,—nothing of the kind. Only that you shall treat her with common decency,—which you have not done!” Uncle John was provoked.

“You are quite complimentary, I must confess,” said Mrs. Dainty, with an offended manner.

“I speak the truth, and that is always the highest compliment I shall ever pay you, my foolish niece!” retorted Uncle John, who used his prerogative, in most cases, to the full extent.

“I think we had better drop this subject,” said Mrs. Dainty.

“Very well; let it drop now. I will renew it again when your feelings are less excited and your judgment less obscured. Only let me repeat my warning about Miss Harper. You have an angel in your dwelling: let her remain to bless your children. But the guest will not remain if you treat her as though she were a spirit of evil.”

CHAPTER V.

THE WIND AND THE SUN.

“Mother, can’t I take my music-lesson first?” said Agnes. It was on the morning after her fruitless effort to be mistress instead of scholar.

Mrs. Dainty was in the middle of one of the most absorbing chapters of the “Mysteries of Paris,” a book which she had read until twelve o’clock on the night previous, and to which she had turned, immediately after her late breakfast, with the eagerness of a mere excitement-lover. She did not heed her daughter’s question. Only the sound of a disturbing voice was perceived.

“Mother!” Agnes uttered her name in a loud, impatient tone, grasping her arm as she spoke, and shaking it to attract attention.

“What do you want, you troublesome girl?” Mrs. Dainty turned angrily toward her daughter.

“Can’t I take my music-lesson first?”

“I don’t care what lesson you take first! Go away, and don’t disturb me!”

This was the mother’s thoughtless answer. Agnes glided away in triumph, and Mrs. Dainty’s eyes fell back to the pages of her book, unconscious of the meaning of her reply.

“I’m going to take my music-lesson first!” said Agnes, as she came into the study-room, where Miss Harper was seated with George and Madeline. And she tightened her lips firmly, elevated her chin, and tossed her head jauntily, while from her clear, dark eyes looked out upon her teacher a spirit of proud defiance.

“Very well,” replied Florence, in a voice that showed not the slightest disturbance. “At twelve o’clock I will be ready to give the lesson.”

“I’m going to take it now,” said Agnes, drawing up her petite form to its extreme height, and looking, or rather trying to look, very imperious.

Miss Harper could scarcely help smiling; but she repressed all feeling, and merely answered,—

“You can practise your scales for the next two hours, if you prefer doing so, Agnes. At twelve I will give you a lesson.”

“I’ll go and tell mother that you won’t give me my music-lesson!” said the baffled, indignant girl, flirting out of the room.

“Mother!” She had grasped the arm of her mother again.

“Go away, and don’t annoy me!” Mrs. Dainty threw out her arm, and swept her daughter away from her side.

“Mother!” Agnes had pressed back again, determined that she would be heard.

“What do you want?” Mrs. Dainty dropped her book from before her face, and turned, with anger flashing in her eyes, upon her daughter.

“Miss Harper won’t give me my music-lesson!”

“Oh, dear! There’s to be nothing but trouble with that stuck-up girl!” exclaimed Mrs. Dainty. “I saw it from the first.”

And, tossing her book from her, she started up, and went with quick steps and a burning face to the room where Miss Harper sat with the two children next younger than Agnes, who were leaning upon her and looking up into her face, gathering intelligence from her eyes as well as her fitly-spoken words.

“See here, miss!” exclaimed Mrs. Dainty, as she came sweeping into the room, “I’m getting tired of this kind of work, and it must end! What do you mean by refusing to give Agnes her music-lesson?”

“Do you wish her music to precede her French?” Very calmly, and with a quiet dignity that rebuked the excited mother, was this question asked; but

Mrs. Dainty was partially blinded by anger, and, obeying an ill-natured impulse, made answer,—

“I want no airs nor assumptions from such as you! I hired you to instruct the children, not to set them by the ears. I saw from the beginning that you wouldn’t suit this house,—that a little brief authority would make a tyrant of you, as it does of all vulgar minds.”

Mrs. Dainty was losing herself entirely.

The face of Miss Harper flushed instantly, and for a moment or two an indignant fire burned in her eyes. But right thoughts soon find a controlling influence in all superior minds. The assailed young governess regained, almost as quickly as it had been lost, her calmness of exterior; nor was this calmness merely on the surface. She made no further remark, until the stubble fire in Mrs. Dainty’s mind had flashed up to its full height and then died down for want of solid fuel. Then, in a voice that betrayed nothing of disturbed feeling, she said,—

“If it is your wish, madam, that Agnes should take her music-lesson first, I have no objection. My duty is to teach her, and I am trying to do so faithfully. But things must be done in order. Establish any rules you deem best, and I will adhere to them faithfully.”

“Give Agnes her music-lesson!” Mrs. Dainty spoke with an offensive imperiousness, waving her hand toward the door.

Miss Harper did not move.

“Do you hear me?” exclaimed Mrs. Dainty. The fires had received a new supply of stubble.

“Fool!”

Mrs. Dainty turned quickly, a shame-spot already on her cheek, and met the angry eyes and contemptuous face of Uncle John, who had thrown his voice into her ears alone.

“Fool!” His lips shaped the word for her eyes; and she saw it as plainly as if it had been written in staring capitals.

Uncle John beckoned to her with his head, stepping back as he did so, in order to prevent the other inmates of the room from seeing him. Mrs. Dainty obeyed the signal, and, without venturing another remark, retired from the study-room, and, sweeping past Uncle John, sought refuge in her own chamber.

“A’n’t you going to give me my music-lesson, miss?”

If her mother had retired from the field, there was no disposition whatever on the part of Agnes to follow her example.

“Certainly,” was the mild, evenly-spoken answer.

“Come along, then, and give it to me now.”

“I will be ready at twelve o’clock, Agnes.”

“Mother told you to give it to me now, and you’ve got to do so.”

“Oh, don’t talk so to Miss Harper, Aggy!” said Madeline, her voice trembling and her eyes filling with tears.

The words came just in season. Miss Harper felt that all this was more than she ought to bear; and outraged pride was about rising above convictions of duty.

“Georgy and I love you. We will say our lessons.” The sweet child lifted her large, beautiful eyes to the face of her governess.

“Tell us a story, won’t you, Miss Harper?”

It was George who made the request.

“As soon as you and Madeline have said your lessons, I will tell you a nice little story.” And Florence won him to her will with a kiss.

The lesson-books were opened instantly, and, the light tasks set, the little ones entered upon them with willing spirits.

“Come and give me my music-lesson!” broke in, discordantly, the voice of Agnes.

“At twelve o’clock, Agnes.” There was not the smallest sign of disturbed feeling in the manner of the governess.

“Mother will turn you out of the house! I heard her say so!”

A red spot painted itself on the brow of Miss Harper. But it faded as quickly as it came.

Seeing that she was not to have her will with the governess, Agnes flirted from the room, and sought the apartment to which her mother had retired.

“Mother! mother! That upstart thing says she won’t give me my music-lesson for you nor anybody else!”

Now Agnes went a step too far, and at the wrong moment. It was just then dawning upon the mind of Mrs. Dainty that her daughter had exaggerated the conduct of Miss Harper, and led her into an unladylike exhibition of herself. The sting of mortification excited her quite enough to make her turn with sharp acrimony upon this wilful daughter.

“I don’t believe a word of it!” she said, angrily. “All this trouble has grown out of your bad conduct. Go off and say your lessons at the right time. I won’t be annoyed in this way any longer.”

“But, mother——”

Mrs. Dainty took her by the arm and thrust her from the room, saying, passionately,—

“Don’t let me see your face again to-day!”

For several minutes Agnes sat upon the stairs leading up to the study-room, so disappointed and mortified that only anger kept her from tears. Down from this room came the low murmur of voices; and her ears recognised now that of Madeline or George, and now that of Miss Harper. How musical was the latter, compared with the sound of her mother’s rebuking tones that were still in her ears! In spite of pride and self-will, her heart acknowledged the contrast; and, with this acknowledgment, touches of shame were felt. Even with mean false accusation on her side, self-will had failed to triumph. Success would have blinded her to the quality of her own spirit; but failure made her vision clearer.

All remained still in the mother's chamber and still through the house, as the mortified girl sat almost crouching on the stairs, and quiet was only disturbed faintly by the muffled voices that were heard in the study-room.

Agnes could not help but think, for passion was subsiding; and thought dwelt naturally upon the persons and circumstances by which passion had been aroused into turbulence. A contrast between the mother's spirit and the spirit thus far shown by Miss Harper forced itself upon her mind, and she saw the beauty of the one and the deformity of the other. In spite of her pride, a feeling of respect for Miss Harper was born; and with this respect something of contempt for her weak, passionate mother found an existence.

"Now tell us the story, won't you, Miss Harper?"

It was the voice of George, ringing down from the study-room. The lessons were over; and the promised story was to come.

Scarcely conscious of what she was doing, Agnes moved quietly up the stairs, until she was near enough to the door of the study-room to hear distinctly.

"There was once a little flower-bud." Miss Harper began her story in a low voice, and Agnes leaned forward, listening earnestly. "It was very small, and two green leaves gathered their arms closely around it, for there was a hidden treasure of sweetness in the heart of that bud. One day the cold, angry wind came along, and wanted the bud to open her beautiful pink leaves and give out from her heart the sweet perfumes that were hidden there. He blew harshly upon her, throwing her little head first on one side and then upon the other, and called angrily for her to open, that her sweetness might breathe in his ugly face. But the two green leaves only hugged their arms closer around the bud. Then he dashed her head upon the ground, and tried to trample the life out of her; for he did not love her at all: he only loved himself. The light stem that held the bud did not break, but only bent down, and, when the cruel wind was gone, raised up again from the ground and lifted the bud into the warm sunshine that was coming abroad.

"It was very different when the gentle, loving sunshine came and asked the two green leaves to unclasp themselves and let the bud grow into a

flower, that the sweetness might come out of its little heart. Greener and softer grew these leaves, and they seemed almost to smile with pleasure, as they gently fell back from the swelling bud, that opened and opened in the face of the sunshine until it became a beautiful flower, the perfume in its heart filling all the air around.”

Miss Harper paused.

“What a sweet story!” said Madeline, looking still into the face of her governess, and with wondering eyes, for she felt, child as she was, that the story had a signification.

“Love and kindness are always better than anger,” said Miss Harper, answering the child’s eyes.

“The sunshine was love?” said Madeline.

“Yes; and the cold wind was anger.”

“And what was the flower?” asked the child.

“You and George are human flowers, dear;” and, from the swelling love in her pure spirit, Miss Harper pressed a kiss on the lips of both the children.

“Am I a flower?” asked George.

“I call you a little human flower,” answered the governess,—“a little human flower, with love in your heart, hidden away there like sweetness in the heart of the bud I was telling you about. Will you let me be your sunshine?”

The wayward boy flung his arms around the neck of Florence and clasped her tightly, but without speaking. He felt more than he could utter.

A tear dropped upon the hand of Agnes, as she sat upon the stairs near the door of the study-room. It seemed to her as if heaven were in that room, while she was on the outside. Never in her life had she felt so strangely; never had such a sense of desolation oppressed her. That lesson of the bud, the wind, and the sunshine,—how deeply it had sunk into her heart! Acting from a sudden impulse, she started up, and, going in where the young

governess sat with an arm drawn around each of the two children, she said, with burning eyes, and a voice unsteady from emotion,—

“Be my sunshine also, Miss Harper! Oh, be my sunshine! I have long enough been hurt by the angry wind!”

An appeal so unlooked for surprised Florence; but she did not hesitate. Rising instantly, she took the extended hands of Agnes in both of hers, and answered,—

“I have only sunshine to give, dear Agnes. Regard me no longer as an enemy and an oppressor. I am your friend.”

“I know it, I know it, Miss Harper!”

“Your true friend,” added Florence, kissing her. “And now,” she added, in a sweet, persuasive voice, “let us make this room sacred to peace, order, and instruction, and open all its windows for love’s warm sunshine to stream in upon us daily.”

“It shall be no fault of mine if otherwise,” was the low, earnest reply of the young girl, whom love had conquered.

CHAPTER VI. THE GOVERNESS DISMISSED.

“How do you like your governess?” inquired a fashionable friend, who was making a call upon Mrs. Dainty.

Mrs. Dainty shook her head and pursed up her lips in a vulgar way that was natural to her.

“Not perfect, of course,” said the friend.

“No,—not within a thousand miles of perfection.”

“An American girl, I presume?”

“Yes.” The lip of Mrs. Dainty assumed a curl of contempt.

“Poor American girls are an indifferent set,” remarked the lady. “A’n’t you afraid that your children will, imperceptibly, imbibe her low habits and vulgar ways of speaking?”

“Yes; that is my greatest fear. Already I think I see a change.”

“I wouldn’t keep her an hour, if that were the case,” said the lady. “No, not for the fraction of an hour!” she added, with emphasis. “I had almost as soon see my children vicious as vulgar; for vice may be eradicated, but vulgarity is a stain nothing can polish out.”

“And, to add to her offence,” remarked Mrs. Dainty, “she has assumed an upstart authority which has kept the house in hot water ever since she came into it. The children, and particularly Agnes, will not submit to her rules and exactions.”

“Why don’t you pack her off? I’d do it in less than no time,” said the refined acquaintance.

“I’ve about made up my mind to do it, and in spite of all opposition.”

“Opposition! Who has any right to oppose?”

“That fussy old uncle of mine is always meddling in our affairs,—Uncle John.”

“Why do you keep him about the house?”

“He’s my mother’s brother,” replied Mrs. Dainty. She could have given a better reason; but it would have been at the expense of an exposure of selfishness she did not care to make.

“If he were my mother’s great-grandfather, he couldn’t find harbor in my house if he interfered in what didn’t concern him,” said the lady.

Mrs. Dainty sighed. Uncle John was a great trouble to her, for he would say what he thought and do what he pleased. But then Uncle John owned the house they lived in, which they occupied rent free, or in compensation for board. And, moreover, Uncle John was worth two or three dollars where her not over-thrifty husband was worth one. No, no. It wouldn’t just answer to turn Uncle John out of the house; for that would be a losing business.

“If I could only find the right stamp of a governess,” said Mrs. Dainty, sighing again.

“I think I know a person who would just suit you.”

“Oh, indeed! Where can I see her?”

“Have you any acquaintance with Mrs. Ashton?”

“No,—though I have long desired to be numbered among her friends.”

“Only yesterday she mentioned to me,” said the visitor, “that she knew a highly-accomplished English lady, a widow, whose husband died in the East India Company’s service, and asked me to bear her in remembrance if I should hear of any one who wanted a governess.”

“How fortunate!” exclaimed Mrs. Dainty. “An educated English lady! What more could I desire?”

“Nothing. Shall I speak to Mrs. Ashton about you, and learn the lady’s address?”

“By all means. Won’t you see her this very day?”

“If you desire it.”

“Oh, I do desire it above all things.”

“I will see the lady for you.”

“How kind of you!”

“Shall I say that you wish to engage her?”

“Oh, by all means!”

“What will you do with your American girl?” asked the lady.

“Give her notice to quit immediately. She shall not pass another night under this roof: my mind is made up to that. The way she has acted this day decides me.”

“At what time shall I tell this English lady to call?”

“I will see her at four this afternoon.”

“Very well.”

“In the mean time I will close up matters with Miss Harper.”

“Is that the name of your present governess?” inquired the lady, evincing some interest.

“Yes.”

“Florence Harper?”

“Yes. Do you know any thing about her?”

“I knew her mother when I was a girl,” replied the lady,—“though I never fancied her a great deal. She had too much mock dignity for me. She married very well, and for some time moved in moderately good society. But her husband failed in business several years ago, and died shortly afterward, I think. So it is her daughter you have for a governess! How things will come around! There was a time when she seemed to think I

wasn't good enough to associate with her; and now her daughter has come down to the position of a hireling. Well, well! Isn't this a queer world? If Florence is like her mother, I don't think she will suit."

"She puts on airs above her station," said Mrs. Dainty.

"An inherited fault. Her mother had a way of looking down upon everybody. I couldn't bear her!"

"Humph! This spawn of hers actually assumed to put herself on a level with me, and to 'approve' my opinions in regard to the children's education! I was too provoked!"

"You'll always have trouble with her," said the lady. "The stock isn't right. Is Agnes taking lessons in music?" she inquired, in a pause that followed. The sound of a piano had for some time been heard.

Mrs. Dainty drew out her watch as she answered in the affirmative. She saw that it was half-past twelve o'clock. A moment or two she listened, while a serious expression came into her face.

"I don't like that," said she.

"What?"

"This girl is bound to have her way, I see!"

"Who?"

"Why, Miss Harper. There's been a contention between her and Agnes about the hour at which the music-lesson shall be given. Agnes wished to take it at ten o'clock; but Miss Harper said twelve. I told her two hours ago to give Agnes her lesson. But you see how it is! She means to be mistress. I'm too provoked!"

"If she begins by domineering over your children in this way, what will it be in the end? I only wonder that a girl like Agnes would submit."

"It is the last music-lesson she gives in this house," said Mrs. Dainty. "My mind is made up to that. Send me the English lady, and I will engage her on the spot. Tell her that I would like her to come this very day, if it is

agreeable. I will send Miss Harper away, and take her without consulting anybody. When the thing is done, Uncle John may scold to his heart's content. He can't change the fact."

And so the thing was settled. At dinner-time Mrs. Dainty maintained a perfect silence in regard to the governess. Agnes looked subdued. Her mother noticed this, and her blood grew hot as she imagined the cause to be a crushed spirit under the iron rule of Miss Harper. Uncle John had made it his business to see a great deal more of what was going on than any one imagined. He understood the state of Agnes's mind far better than did her mother. All was coming right, he saw, and his wise heart, so full of interest for the children, felt a burden of care removed. After dinner he went out.

"Just what I wished for," said Mrs. Dainty to herself, as she saw him take his hat and cane. "I will make clean work of it with this 'angel' of yours: see if I don't!"

"Tell Miss Harper that I wish to see her in my room," Mrs. Dainty spoke to a servant, half an hour later. The servant carried the message to the governess, who obeyed the summons without a moment's delay.

"I have sent for you, Miss Harper, to say what you must have yourself inferred,—that you will not suit me for a governess."

Mrs. Dainty spoke coldly,—almost severely. That Florence was surprised, her suddenly-heightened color showed plainly. She caught her breath, and, for a few moments, looked bewildered. Mrs. Dainty observed this, and said,—

"You have no reason to be surprised or disappointed, miss. I told you in the beginning that I didn't think you would suit; and I have never seen cause for a moment to change my mind since you came into the house. Instead of falling into your place and doing your duty as became one in your position, you have done nothing but keep me and the children in hot water from the day you entered the house. When you get a good situation again, take my advice, and be content with a hireling's place, and don't assume the airs of a mistress. No lady will have her children domineered over as you have domineered over mine."

"Mrs. Dainty, I repel——"

“Not a word to me, miss! Not a word to me!” replied the lady, imperiously. “I permit no one in my house to answer back. Here are your wages for the time you have been instructing the children. Take the money, and go!”

Miss Harper did not touch the money, but turned away, and was leaving the room.

“Miss Harper!” The voice of Mrs. Dainty had in it a commanding tone.

Florence paused, and turned partly around.

“Why don’t you take the money? say!”

“I cannot receive pay for services that are so poorly regarded,” was her calmly-spoken answer.

“Impudent!” Miss Harper turned away again.

“Stop!” The foot of Mrs. Dainty jarred on the floor. Miss Harper looked back.

“Don’t see one of the children; but go off with yourself immediately!”

The young governess flitted away almost as noiselessly as a spirit. At the same moment Mrs. Dainty rung her bell violently. To the servant who answered, she said,—

“Tell all the children to come to my room.”

“They shall see who is mistress in this house.” (So she talked with herself in the interval.) “Uncle John has had his way a little too long. But there is a point beyond which patience ceases to be a virtue; and I have arrived at that point.”

“What do you want, mamma?” asked Madeline, as she came with Agnes and her little brother into her mother’s apartment.

“I want you to stay here with me,” was the cold answer.

“Can’t I go back to Miss Harper? She was telling us such a sweet story when you sent for her.”

“No; you can’t go back. You must stay here.”

“I don’t want to stay here. I’m going back to Miss Harper. I like her better than anybody in this house.” And little self-willed George made for the door, in his determined way.

“You George! Come back this instant!” cried his mother, in anger.

“A’n’t a-going to,” replied the little rebel.

“George!”

“A’n’t a-going to!” sounded resolutely down from the stairs.

“I’ll punish you!”

“Don’t care! Miss Harper! Miss Harper!”

Almost like a fury did the mother rush away after her child. He heard her coming, and ran to Miss Harper for protection. She had gone to her own apartment: not seeing her in the study-room, the child knew where to find her.

“Go back to your mother, George!” said Florence, speaking firmly, but kindly, as the child rushed toward her.

“A’n’t a-going to!”

“Oh, yes; Georgie must.”

“No, no! A’n’t a-going to!”

“This is the way you encourage disobedience in my children!” exclaimed Mrs. Dainty, as she swept into the room at the moment when Miss Harper was stooping down to kiss the little boy in the fulness of her swelling love. “Out of my house! and quickly!”

Grasping George by an arm, she bore him, screaming, from the room; and, as his cries came back to her from the distance, Miss Harper could hear mingling with them the sound of passionate blows.

“Poor children!” she said. “There is good in them, but how sadly overgrown by weeds! With such a mother, what hope is there? But I must not linger here. For their sakes I would have remained, even though suffering insult daily. No choice is left me, however, and I must go.”

As Miss Harper passed the door of Mrs. Dainty’s room, on her way down-stairs, dressed to leave the house, she heard the sobbing of George and Madeline, mingled with stormy words that were passing between Agnes and her mother. The purport of these she did not stop to hear, but hurried on, and, without seeing or speaking to any one, took her silent departure.

CHAPTER VII. A REVELATION.

“Florence!” Miss Harper stopped suddenly, and looked up in a bewildered manner.

“Florence!” repeated the voice of Uncle John.

“Mr. Fleetwood!” She could only utter the kind old man’s name in a low, choking voice.

“Where are you going, Florence?” he asked.

“Home,” was the answer.

“Has any thing happened at home? Is your aunt sick?”

“No, sir.”

“Are *you* sick, Florence?”

“Yes, sir. Sick at heart!” was the reply of Florence, made with quivering lips.

Uncle John turned, and walked beside Miss Harper, in the direction he had found her going.

“There is something wrong, Florence,” said he. “Why have you left the house of my niece so suddenly?”

“Mrs. Dainty has dispensed with my services.”

“What?”

“Mrs. Dainty does not wish me any longer to hold the place of governess to her children,” said Florence.

Uncle John was silent for some moments. He then said,—

“How did this happen? Tell me every thing freely.”

Florence related what had passed between her and Mrs. Dainty at the hurried interview preceding her departure from the house.

“You must go back again,” said Uncle John, after Florence had finished her brief narrative.

“Impossible!” was her firm answer.

“Say not so, Florence.”

“Impossible, Mr. Fleetwood! Impossible! I am not strong enough to bear all this insult and indignity. I can suffer pain, or even death; but my spirit will not brook humiliation like this! Only for the children’s sake have I remained up to this day.”

“And only for their sakes would I still have you remain,” said Uncle John.

“But the door is shut against me; and I will never knock to have it opened,” said the young girl, with an indignant spirit; “never! never!” She repeated the words very firmly.

“The door must be opened for you, and without the preliminary of a knock. Leave all that to me,” said Uncle John.

By this time they had reached a small house in a part of the city where persons in moderate circumstances reside, and both paused at the door.

“Will you come in, Mr. Fleetwood?” said Miss Harper, speaking in a tone of unusual familiarity. “Aunt Mary will, I know, be glad to see you.”

“Yes, I must go in, and have a little more talk with you, and a little conference with good Aunt Mary.”

In the next moment they passed together into the house,—the manner of Uncle John being that of a man who was entering a familiar place. In the small, neatly-furnished sitting-room to which both proceeded they found a plainly-dressed lady, somewhat advanced in years. She was reading in a

volume that seemed to have been taken up casually, as her knitting-work was in her lap.

“How are you, Mrs. Elder?” said Uncle John, in the familiar voice of a friend; and he took the old lady’s hand and shook it cordially.

“Right well, and right glad to see you, Mr. Fleetwood,” was the frank, cheerful response, as she returned the hearty pressure of Uncle John’s hand. “But to what cause am I indebted for this visit?” she added, a slight shadow coming into her face as she looked more narrowly at Florence.

“A providential one, doubtless,” said Mr. Fleetwood, smiling. “I met your niece, just now, fleeing from the post of duty, and have accompanied her hither, that I might hear the report she has to make of herself.”

“A good report, I doubt not,” replied the old lady, throwing a kind but serious glance upon the countenance of her niece.

“When the door is shut in your face, you can hardly be blamed for leaving the threshold,” said Florence, with some bitterness in her tones.

“Is it so bad as that, my child?” Mrs. Elder spoke with much tenderness, which did not wholly conceal a flush of indignation.

“Just so bad.” Florence said this slowly, and with an emphasis on every word. “Just so bad,” she repeated. “And yet Mr. Fleetwood wishes me to return for the children’s sake.”

“And is not that a powerful motive?” said the old gentleman, speaking before Mrs. Elder had time to reply. “For the children’s sake! For the sake of those little ones whom the Lord, when upon the earth, took up in his arms and blessed with a divine blessing,—who are so precious in the eyes of Heaven that their angels do always behold the face of Our Father. I urged, you see, Mrs. Elder, no light motive.”

The eyes and countenance of Florence both drooped to the floor, and she remained sitting almost motionless.

“I must know all the facts in the case, Mr. Fleetwood, before I can say a word touching the duty of my niece. What she sees to be right she has the courage to do, and, if my eyes can aid her in seeing right, I will gladly lend

her their more experienced vision. Let me have the whole story of this new trouble with Mrs. Dainty.”

In as few words as possible, Florence rehearsed what had passed between her and Mrs. Dainty, giving to her auditors that lady’s emphatic and insulting terms of dismissal.

Mrs. Elder remained gravely silent for some minutes after Florence had ceased speaking; while Mr. Fleetwood waited patiently to get the conclusion of her thoughts.

“I don’t see that it is possible for Florence to go back again,” said the old lady, speaking as if that view of the case were clearly settled in her mind.

“Extreme cases require extreme measures,” said Mr. Fleetwood. “I treat my niece, for most of the time, as if she were partially demented. And so she is; for vanity and love of the world have in a measure dethroned her reason. She was my favorite when a little girl; and I remained strongly attached to her as she grew up toward womanhood,—though I could not be over-patient with the fashionable follies to which she showed far too early an inclination. For some years I have been altogether out of heart with her, and see no hope of her reformation, except through virtue of some great calamity. But she has children, to whom all my love is transferred,—children who may be trained to good or warped to evil. I had almost come to despair of them, when a bright day renewed old acquaintanceship, and I discovered in your excellent niece all the qualities needed to save these children. How wisely, lovingly, and unselfishly she has performed her task so far I need not repeat to you, Mrs. Elder, for I have told you every word before. And now, do you think I can give her up? No, no. She must return. But I will make the way as easy for her as possible. All the rough places I cannot hope to make even; but she has courage to walk, if she knows the voice of duty, even where sharp stones are certain to cut her tender feet. Already she has won her way into the hearts of the children, and has at this moment more power over them for good than any living soul. This power must not be lost.”

“Every child that is born,” said Aunt Mary, in a thoughtful tone, “is precious in the eyes of God, and his love toward that child is manifested in the best possible arrangement of things external to its life, in order that

these may awaken in its heart emotions of kindness, mercy, and pity toward others. Such emotions, whenever excited, fix themselves as permanent things in the young immortal, and remain there like good seed that may be warmed into life and produce good fruit when time has brought the age of rational freedom. It is by such remains of good and true things in all their varieties, which are stored up in the minds of children from the earliest days of infancy, up to manhood, that our Divine Father is able to save us from the evil inclinations we inherit, when we step forth, as men and women, self-reliant and rationally responsible. To help in the work of storing up in the minds of young children such ‘remains,’ as I have called them, is indeed a heavenly work; and all who engage in it are co-workers with angels.”

“And to neglect such work,” said Mr. Fleetwood, “when it lies in our way, and will be performed by no other hands if we refuse to do it, involves no light responsibility. The perversion, corruption, and final ruin of an immortal soul is a fearful thought.”

A deep sigh fluttered the bosom of Florence Harper; but she made no remark.

“If a mother neglect her high duties in this regard,” said Mrs. Elder, “can we say that another becomes responsible in her stead?”

Florence raised her head and listened with marked interest for Mr. Fleetwood’s answer to this question. He reflected a moment, and then made reply:—

“For the work God sets before us are we alone responsible. His love for his children is so great that he is ever providing the means to help them to a knowledge of the good that is needful to secure their happiness. If those appointed by nature to do good to his little ones neglect their high trust, he leads others to a knowledge of their wants; and, if these pass by unmoved to kindness, he still offers the heavenly work to other hands.”

The head of Florence again drooped, and again her bosom trembled with a sigh.

“I do not ask Florence to return to our house to-day,” said Mr. Fleetwood. “She must have a little time for rest and reflection, and I must have a little time for observation and management at home. The meaning of this hasty

step on the part of my niece I do not comprehend. Something lies behind it that I must make out clearly before acting.”

“I will see you in the morning, Florence,” added the old gentleman, on rising to go. Then, taking her hand, he said, very earnestly, and with slight emotion,—

“Ever regard me as your friend,—nay, more than a friend,—as a father. Do not fear that I will advise you to any course of action in this matter that I would not advise you to take were you indeed my own child—as—as you might have been!”

The voice of the old man grew strangely veiled with feeling as he uttered, in something of an absent way, the closing words of the last sentence.

“Yes! yes! as you might have been, Florence!” repeated Mr. Fleetwood, with sudden energy, catching at the hand of the young girl and pressing it to his lips.

“Tell her all! yes, tell her all!” he added, turning to Mrs. Elder in a hurried, excited manner. “Her presence moves me strangely, and memories of the past are too strong for an old man’s feelings.”

Mr. Fleetwood left, abruptly, the apartment, passing into the street, and so leaving the aunt and niece alone.

“Tell me all of what, Aunt Mary?” said Florence, coming to the side of Mrs. Elder. Her face had become very pale.

“A simple story of thwarted love and undying affection,” replied Aunt Mary, calmly. “Mr. Fleetwood loved your mother, and that love was only in a measure returned. Your father won her heart more truly, and she decided in his favor. They were married, and you are their only child. If your mother had married Mr. Fleetwood, the current of her life might have run smoother; but whether she would have been happier is not for me to say. Mr. Fleetwood never would marry again; and it seems that his love for your mother has been an undying passion. I will say no more than this. But he is a man of great moral worth, noble sentiments, and a true heart. His interest in you is not a passing whim or preference, but has in it such deep regard as a wise and good father knows only for his child. And so you may be very

sure that he will advise you to no course of action in regard to his niece and her children that he would not advise for his own daughter. It was his love for these children that led him to desire you for their governess,— you, whom he rightly knew only through my representation of your character. I think you will see it best to return to your post.”

“I can only go back through Mrs. Dainty’s invitation, and, I was going to say, after her apology.”

“Withhold for the present that last condition,” said Aunt Mary. “I doubt not, when the time comes, the way in which your feet should walk will be made very plain.”

CHAPTER VIII. THE NEW GOVERNESS.

Mrs. Dainty was asleep in her easy-chair, and the children, with no governess to interest or instruct them, were ranging through the house at will, and finding their own amusements, when the educated English lady arrived, and sent up her card.

“Mrs. Jeckyl—Jeckyl: who is she? I have no acquaintance by that name,” said Mrs. Dainty, as she looked at the card through her half-awake eyes. “What kind of a person is she?”

“She’s dressed in black,” replied the waiter.

“Have you ever seen her before?” inquired Mrs. Dainty.

“No, ma’am.”

“Is she genteel-looking? Has she the appearance of a lady?”

“She walks like a lady,” replied the discriminating waiter; “but her black is a little rusty.”

“Somebody that wants charity, I suppose,” said Mrs. Dainty, with a look of disgust and an impatient toss of the head. “Go down and say that I am engaged, but that she can send me word as to her business.”

The waiter retired. On coming back he said,—

“The woman wouldn’t tell me her business. She says she was desired to call by Mrs. Ashton, but that, if you are not prepared to see her, it is of no consequence.”

“Mrs. Ashton! Oh, yes; now I understand! Has she gone?”

The manner of Mrs. Dainty changed suddenly; and she made the inquiry with manifest eagerness.

“She acted as if she were going,” replied the waiter.

“Go back quickly, and say that I will be down in a moment.”

A gleam of satisfaction shot across the face of Mrs. Dainty.

“My new English governess!” she ejaculated, in a low tone, as the waiter left the room. “I’ll soon have a new order of things with the children!”

After slightly adjusting her dress, which had become disarranged during her sleep in the easy-chair, Mrs. Dainty put on as grave an air of dignity as she could assume, and went down to the parlor. As she entered, a tall woman dressed in black arose, and stood, awaiting her approach, with a half proud, half deferential air, fixing upon her at the same time two small, gray, piercing eyes, that seemed to go right through Mrs. Dainty. Her widow’s weeds, as the waiter had informed his mistress, were a little rusty; and the same might be said of her complexion. Her nose was rather a marked feature for prominence and size; her lips were delicate in comparison with the rest of her face, and had a certain flexibility which showed them to be quick indicators of feeling. The whole aspect of the face made upon Mrs. Dainty, at the first glance, rather an unfavorable impression; and she seemed to be pushed from rather than drawn toward the woman.

“Mrs. Jeckyl?” she said, assuming a frank, smiling courtesy, as she came forward and offered her hand.

“My name.” And the visitor bowed with a reserved dignity, giving only the tips of her fingers to Mrs. Dainty.

“Mrs. Ashton desired you to call?”

“Yes, ma’am. She said you were about changing your governess, and would like to see me on the subject.”

The woman’s manner a little embarrassed Mrs. Dainty: there was in it an air of conscious superiority that rather overawed her.

“I have dismissed an upstart American girl, who took on airs with both me and my children,” replied Mrs. Dainty, with considerable warmth.

“American girls, I have observed,” said the visitor, “are apt to forget themselves in the respect you mention. It grows naturally out of your system of government, I presume. This equality of the people must often show itself as an offensive element in society. I have been many times annoyed by it since I came to America.”

“Oh, it’s dreadful!” replied Mrs. Dainty. “Dreadful!”

“Like other evils,” was replied, “it will, I suppose, cure itself in time. People who can afford to be independent will throw off the rude familiars who thrust themselves too far in advance of their right positions.”

“Exactly so, as I have done in the case of Miss Harper, whom I sent off without a moment’s warning, for the offence of presumption. She very foolishly imagined that her judgment and her will touching the children were superior to mine, and ventured to set me at naught in their eyes. It was a bold experiment on her part, and proved, of course, a failure.”

“If all American ladies would act with a like decision of character,” said Mrs. Jeckyl, “a needed reform would take place much sooner than it is likely to occur while things go on as at present. But to the purpose of my visit. You desire, as I understand, to secure the services of a competent governess for your children.”

“I do,” replied Mrs. Dainty.

“So I have been informed; and I have called to see you at the particular request of Mrs. Ashton. I do not know that I am prepared to make a positive engagement at present, however. The position will be new to me; and I feel averse to assuming it. Having moved all my life in the best English society, I find it hard to repress a natural repugnance to becoming a mere employee—a kind of half servant—in an American family.”

“I am not surprised at the feeling,” said Mrs. Dainty, whose respect for the lady had mounted at least thirty degrees on the scale of estimation. “It would be strange if you felt differently. But I think we can make your position in our family wholly agreeable. At least, it shall not be my fault if there is any failure.”

“If the lady herself is on my side——” Mrs. Jeckyl paused.

“You need not be troubled for the rest,” said Mrs. Dainty, finishing the sentence.

“Very truly said,” was remarked, in a compliant, insinuating manner.

The two ladies then came down to a regular business interview, in which the questions of service and compensation were fully discussed. The terms of the applicant were high, and her stipulations varied. She was to have no care of the children beyond their education. Mrs. Dainty must have a nurse to give all attention to their bodily wants, while she administered solely to their mental needs. The hours of study must be fixed, and the nurse produce the children at the study-room doors precisely at the time specified. With the termination of the study-hours, all demands upon the governess for service in the family must end. After that her time must be her own. As to her meals, they must be sent to her room, and she must have the privilege of ordering as she desired from the day’s bill of fare. All this was imperative, and all this Mrs. Dainty yielded, so earnest was she in her desire to secure the services of this accomplished English lady.

“There is one thing of which I must advise you,” said Mrs. Dainty, during the interview. “We have residing with us a bachelor uncle of mine, who, being in no business, amuses himself by petty interferences in our family concerns. He is a terrible annoyance sometimes. I mention this in the beginning, that you may be prepared for him. One of the reasons why I sent off that American girl was, because he took her side in every thing, and encouraged her in all her airs and assumptions.”

“He must keep out of my way.” There was a peculiar lifting of Mrs. Jeckyl’s upper lip as she said this,—as we sometimes see it in an angry beast,—just showing her teeth enough to make it evident that she had the power to bite, and the will, too under sufficient provocation. The effect on Mrs. Dainty was not pleasant; but she waved aside the warning impression as something in which there was no meaning.

“Hold him entirely aloof,” she said. “Do not permit his interference in the smallest matter.”

“What right has he to interfere?” Mrs. Jeckyl showed a measure of womanly indignation.

“None!” was answered, with warmth. “None! I consider myself competent to decide in all questions touching the management of my own children, and his meddlesome interference puts me out of all patience. We must lay our heads together to circumvent him entirely.”

“Why circumvent?” said Mrs. Jeckyl. “Why take all that trouble? Isn’t there an easier and plainer way?”

“I do not wish seriously to offend my uncle,” replied Mrs. Dainty, slightly depressing her tone. “He is an excellent, well-meaning, kind-hearted man. I would therefore circumvent rather than harshly oppose him. He is rather quick-tempered, and an open rupture might ensue. The best way for you will be to keep him entirely at a distance. Stand wholly on your dignity. Do not respond to any suggestion or advice that he may offer in regard to the children, but keep your own counsel and carry out your own views.”

“Trust me for that,” said Mrs. Jeckyl. “He will always find me rock or India-rubber.”

“When will you come?” asked Mrs. Dainty, as this preliminary interview was about closing.

“As early as you desire,” replied the educated English lady. “To-morrow, if it is agreeable.”

“I wish you would say this afternoon.”

“This afternoon!” Mrs. Jeckyl opened her small gray eyes wider than usual.

“I have a particular reason,” said Mrs. Dainty.

“If it is very particular.” There was a yielding air about Mrs. Jeckyl.

“It is,—*very* particular. I will explain. Uncle John knows nothing at all yet about my break with Miss Harper, and still thinks her in the house. Her services were obtained through him, and he seems to regard her as a kind of *protégé*. Now, in order to let him understand that I am entirely in earnest, and that her return is impossible, I wish him to learn two facts in the case at the same time,—that the old governess has left the house, and that a new

one has entered. This will prevent a brief but unpleasant struggle for the mastery. You understand me?"

"Certainly."

"And will remain?"

Mrs. Jeckyl reflected for some time.

"I see exactly what you wish to accomplish," she said, "and sympathize with you entirely. To-morrow would suit me better; yet troublesome difficulties may pile themselves up between this and to-morrow."

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," remarked Mrs. Dainty.

"It is, as every one has proved a hundred times in life," said the new governess.

"It will be wise for us, then, to use the ounce of prevention."

"It will," replied Mrs. Jeckyl.

"Then you will at once assume your new duties in my family?"

"Yes."

"I am delighted at your compliance!" said Mrs. Dainty, pleased as an impulsive child in gaining some desired object. "We shall soon have a new order of things that will defy Uncle John's petty interference. Come with me, and I will take you to your room and then introduce you to my children."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHADOW OF EVIL.

Showing the room was a simple affair, but when it came to showing up the children the matter assumed rather a complicated aspect. Agnes was the first whom Mrs. Dainty ventured to introduce to the new governess.

“My oldest daughter, Mrs. Jeckyl,” she said, as Agnes, who had been summoned to the study-room, entered with a grave, half-wondering, perceptibly-clouded face. “Agnes, Mrs. Jeckyl, our new governess, who takes the place of Miss Harper.”

Agnes, who had advanced to within a few steps of her mother and Mrs. Jeckyl, stopped suddenly. The quicker-flowing blood dyed her face to a deep crimson. The tall, repulsive-looking Englishwoman—repulsive to the sight of Agnes—advanced a step and offered her hand; but, instead of taking the extended hand, Agnes merely returned her sharp penetrating look, with one half fearful and half repugnant.

“Why don’t you speak to the lady?” said Mrs. Dainty, with some sharpness of tone.

Agnes partially extended her hand, and Mrs. Jeckyl, changing her dignified look to one of smiling insinuation, accepted the reluctant courtesy.

“Sit down, my dear.” Mrs. Dainty’s manner changed, and her voice assumed its pleasantest tones.

The three then sat down, facing each other, but neither of them at ease.

“Mrs. Jeckyl,” said the mother, “has come to take the place of Miss Harper as your governess. She is an accomplished English lady, and will be very kind to you. I shall expect you to submit yourselves to her dutifully, and to be guided by her instructions. You are the oldest, my daughter, and your example to Madeline and George will be all-potent. As you lead, they will follow. Lead them kindly, then, into obedience and acquiescence. It is

in your power to make this change an easy one for all parties. Confide in Mrs. Jeckyl. You will find her worthy of all confidence.”

“Believe me, my dear child,” (Mrs. Jeckyl took up the theme in a peculiarly insinuating voice, and with a smile that obliterated nearly every disagreeable feature in her countenance,) “that I am indeed your friend. I do not come here as a harsh, exacting tyrant, but as a sympathizing instructor. I shall not be over-exacting, though earnest in seeking your improvement. Do not fear that I will require you to run where only the skill to walk is possessed. Let us be friends in the beginning.”

And she seized the hand of Agnes and gave it a warm pressure.

Mrs. Dainty was delighted at this; it was so different from the cold, unbending manner of Florence Harper. She saw in it the polished complaisance of a superior, educated woman, in contrast with the weak, upstart pretensions of a presuming American girl elevated by circumstances into a position of authority.

But Agnes was not to be won over so easily. Young eyes often see deeper at the first glance than old ones. The hand taken by Mrs. Jeckyl gave no returning pressure. Mrs. Dainty was chafed at this, and said, with some impatience of manner, yet in a low tone, meant only for the ears of her daughter,—

“This is unladylike! Try and show a little breeding.”

“Oh, never fear, madam,” spoke out, in a free way, the new governess, who had heard the admonition: “we will be good friends enough. Your daughter must have time to make my acquaintance. First impressions are rarely continued. She will find me considerate, just, and sympathizing. I have been young, and can well remember the days of girlhood. Indeed, the child in me is not all extinguished yet. I like your daughter’s face, and see in it the index of a mind to which judicious culture will give strength and beauty.”

“Thank you for the prophecy,” said Mrs. Dainty, highly pleased with this well-timed remark. “I have seen that Agnes possessed more than ordinary endowments, and that all she wanted was a judicious instructor, who could

be at the same time a wise and loving friend. Be that to her, Mrs. Jeckyl, and you will have our everlasting gratitude.”

“Trust me, madam, that I will seek the highest good of your children in all things,” was replied in a manner that was meant to be impressive, but which so thinly veiled the hypocrite that Agnes, whose eyes were upon the woman’s face, curled her lip in almost involuntary contempt.

“Call George and Madeline,” said Mrs. Dainty, but little encouraged by Agnes’s reception of the governess, and anxious to get matters settled between this latter personage and the children as quickly as possible.

Agnes left the room, and soon returned with her brother and sister. Madeline entered with a demure face, and shy, timid air; while George bounded in, boy-like, shouting at the top of his voice.

“George!” Mrs. Dainty held up her finger in a warning way.

George checked his rude manner, and stood with his large eyes fixed curiously upon the face of Mrs. Jeckyl, who tried to put on a most winning countenance. But, so far as the boy was concerned, her effort was entirely fruitless. To him her aspect was wholly repulsive.

“What old woman is this, mamma?” he asked, looking from Mrs. Jeckyl to his mother.

“Why, George! George! Hush! What do you mean? Where are your manners?” And the face of Mrs. Dainty crimsoned.

“You see, Mrs. Jeckyl,” she said, trying to apologize for the child’s rudeness, “how our children ape the coarse manners of these vulgar American domestics. Miss Harper, the governess whom I have just dismissed, has left her mark behind her, as you see; and a very ugly mark it is.”

“She isn’t ugly at all!” exclaimed George, by no means comprehending the drift of his mother’s remark, but understanding clearly enough that Miss Harper was the subject of disparaging words. “She’s beautiful, and I love her. I do!”

“Madeline dear,”—Mrs. Dainty turned from George, over whom she had but little influence, and spoke very pleasantly,—“let me present you to Mrs. Jeckyl, who is to be your governess in the place of Miss Harper.”

But the child, instead of advancing toward Mrs. Jeckyl, stepped back slowly,—as if the woman’s eyes were two broad, strong hands, pushing her away,—receding until she stood against the wall.

“Madeline! Come here this moment! What do you mean?” Mrs. Dainty spoke sharply.

The child now moved, sideling, along the wall, keeping her gaze fixed, as by a kind of fascination, upon Mrs. Jeckyl, until she came opposite to where her mother was sitting. Then, not withdrawing her eyes for an instant from the strange woman’s face, she came forward and stood by her mother’s side.

“This is my second daughter, Madeline,” said Mrs. Dainty, pushing the child toward Mrs. Jeckyl.

“How are you, my dear?” Mrs. Jeckyl, seeming not to observe the intense repugnance of the child, reached out a hand, and, taking hold of Madeline, drew her almost forcibly to her side.

“What a nice little girl!” she said, holding her tightly in one hand, and smoothing her hair with the other. “What sweet curls! Where did you get them, dear?”

But Madeline, with a flushed, half-frightened face, tried to release herself from the woman’s firm grip.

“What dear children you have!” said Mrs. Jeckyl, now insinuating an arm around Madeline, and continuing to smooth her hair with gentle but regularly-repeated passes. “We shall be the best of friends in a little while. I shall love them very much.”

Once or twice Madeline, over whose face rapid changes were passing, (at one moment it was deeply flushed, and at the next overspread by a strange pallor,) made a spring in the effort to release herself. But the hand of Mrs. Jeckyl, that was upon her arm, tightened to a vice-like grasp, while the

other intermitted not for an instant its regular motions, just above, or slightly touching, her hair.

“We shall be very good friends, madam,—the best of friends. I always attach children strongly.” Mrs. Jeckyl spoke confidently, and like one wholly at her ease.

At this moment Mrs. Dainty became oppressed with a feeling of vague terror, united with an almost intolerable repugnance toward Mrs. Jeckyl; and it was with an effort that she overcame the impulse to spring forward and snatch Madeline from her investing arm. A little while she struggled weakly against this strange feeling; then it passed slowly away, and, like one awakening from a dream, she found the current of her life moving on once more in its regular channels. But she had a different impression of Mrs. Jeckyl, and a new feeling toward her. It seemed as if they had been suddenly removed from each other, and to so great a distance that immediate contact was forever impossible. She was about suggesting that it might be as well for Mrs. Jeckyl to defer until the next day her formal entrance into the family, when she observed a change in Madeline, who, instead of endeavoring to get away from the new governess, now leaned against her, although the hand that held her a little while before was no longer closed upon her arm. Almost at the moment of noticing this, Mrs. Jeckyl raised the unresisting child to her lap, who leaned her head back against her, and gazed up into her face with a pleased, confiding, almost affectionate, look.

“I said we would be good friends.” Mrs. Jeckyl glanced with an exultant smile toward Mrs. Dainty. “I understand the art of attaching children. What a dear, sweet child this is! I promise myself a world of pleasure in entering into her pure young mind and storing it with lessons of wisdom. And your oldest daughter——”

Mrs. Jeckyl turned her glittering eyes—that seemed to have in them a charmed power—upon Agnes.

For a moment or two the young girl was retained by them, as if a spell were on her: then she turned away and fled from the room, her whole being pervaded by a strange sense of fear.

Not in the smallest degree did Mrs. Jeckyl seem to be disconcerted at this.

“Young people have curious fancies,” she said, in an even voice. “I am used to them, and know how to adapt myself to all these variant peculiarities. Give yourself no further trouble about my position with your children. I will manage all that. Leave me now with Madeline and George. I want to make their better acquaintance. Come, Georgie dear; I have in my pocket the funniest little box, with the funniest little man in it, you ever saw in your life.”

The funny little box, and the funny little man, won over the romping boy, and he went to the side of Mrs. Jeckyl without a moment’s hesitation.

It was as much as Mrs. Dainty could do to tear herself from the apartment and leave her two little children alone with this woman. She felt a vague sense of evil. A shadow, as from the wing of danger, seemed to have fallen upon her spirit. But Mrs. Jeckyl asked to be alone with them, and she felt that she must retire.

CHAPTER X.

A LITTLE BREEZE.

“Who is that old woman I met on the stairs just now?” inquired Mr. Fleetwood, late in the afternoon of the day made memorable by the entrance of Mrs. Jeckyl into the Dainty family.

“It is our new governess,” replied Agnes, to whom the question was addressed. A look of disgust marred her face as she spoke.

“Your new governess!” exclaimed Uncle John, in amazement. “When did she come, and where from?”

“She came two hours ago; but whether she dropped from the clouds, or was dug out of the earth, is more than I can tell. She’s horrible! I don’t know what’s come over mother!”

“Who is she? What is her name?”

“A wicked-looking old woman, whom mother calls an accomplished English lady. Her name is Jeckyl.”

“Jeckyl? Jeckyl?” Uncle John shook his head. “Never heard of her before.”

“Nor anybody else but mother. And where she found her, the dear only knows!”

“Why was Florence Harper sent away?”

A sad expression came into the face of Agnes, as she replied,—

“My fault, I suppose. In my blind self-will, I resisted her when she was right and I was wrong; and I complained of her unjustly. Mother talked very roughly to her,—she’s always done that; and then—and then, I believe, Miss Harper went away.”

“Miss Harper was a kind, good girl,” said Uncle John, “and tried always to do what was right. I am sorry you misunderstood or resisted her, for she was the best friend you will ever find in a governess.”

“I know she was, uncle; and I have learned it just too late. Oh, I would give any thing in the world to have her back again.”

“I must see your mother at once,” said Uncle John. “Where is she?”

“In her own room.”

“Will you say that I want her?”

Agnes went to her mother’s room.

“Uncle John wishes to see you,” said she.

“What does he want to see me about?” asked Mrs. Dainty.

“I don’t know. He’s waiting for you over in the sitting-room.”

“Tell him I’m engaged just now.”

But that reply didn’t suit Uncle John at all. His niece had no business to be engaged, to him!

“What is she doing?” he inquired of Agnes.

“Reading.”

“Ah, well! If she can’t come to me, I can, at least, go to her.” And Uncle John left the sitting-room. Mrs. Dainty started and looked confused as Mr. Fleetwood entered her chamber.

“Very particularly engaged?” said the old gentleman, a little sarcastically.

“I didn’t imagine that your business was one of life and death!” retorted Mrs. Dainty, with heightening color.

“And yet it may be, for all your defect of imagination,” said the old man, seating himself with the air of one who had something on his mind.

“Where is Florence Harper?”

“That is a question not in my power to answer,” replied Mrs. Dainty. “She left here some hours ago.”

“Why did she leave?”

“I sent her away.”

“For what cause?”

“She did not suit me.”

“In what respect?”

“In all respects.”

“A sweeping range of objections, truly. May I ask another question?”

“Forty, if you like.”

“Who is that old woman I met on the stairs a little while ago?”

“Old woman! I’ve seen no *old woman*.” Mrs. Dainty emphasized the last words.

“A middle-aged woman, then, with a hard—almost wicked—face. She was dressed in black.”

“Our new governess, probably,” said Mrs. Dainty.

“That old hag your new governess!” Uncle John felt outraged, and spoke intemperately.

“I beg of you not to use such language, Uncle John.” Mrs. Dainty affected calmness, and spoke in a tone of quiet rebuke. “The person to whom you refer is an accomplished English lady, whose husband—a man of rank, I believe—died in the East India Company’s service.”

“Poh! A cast-off, superannuated lady’s maid, more like!” retorted Uncle John, with overflowing indignation.

“This is insufferable!” exclaimed Mrs. Dainty, losing temper.

“What is insufferable?”

It was Uncle John's turn to assume an exterior calmness.

"Your unwarrantable interference in our family concerns! It has come to a pretty pass when I cannot even buy a beefsteak, or turn off a disorderly domestic, but you must interfere in the matter and volunteer an ignorant condemnation. To tell you the plain truth, Uncle John, I am getting very tired of this, and wish it to end. I didn't consult you about this affair, because I didn't think it one in which you had any rights or interest."

"Indeed! You ignore my interests quite summarily. Pray, did you consult your husband?" inquired Mr. Fleetwood.

"No, I did not!" was replied. "There was no occasion to worry his mind on the subject."

"Probably you thought he had no more right in the case than your troublesome old uncle," said Mr. Fleetwood, sarcastically.

"Whether he had or not doesn't signify in the present controversy," replied Mrs. Dainty, still showing a great deal of angry excitement. "I chose to send away an offensive, upstart American girl, who didn't know her place, and who kept the children by the ears half of the time, and take in her stead an accomplished, middle-aged lady, with years and experience on her side. I have no question in regard to my husband's acquiescence, and therefore shall not permit you to hector me on the subject. So pray, Uncle John, spare me any further annoyance! It will only tend to produce, in both of us, states of unkindness."

"Where so much is at stake, I must venture much," said Mr. Fleetwood. "I pray you, in turn, be not offended, if I press you on this subject. The love I bear for you and these children will not let me keep silence. You have strangely misapprehended Florence Harper. She——"

"Uncle John!" Mrs. Dainty interrupted the old gentleman, "I have shut the door against her: so let her name die in this house. I shall not consent to canvass with you either her good or evil qualities. I know just as much of her as I ever care to know."

"What do you know of this Mrs. Jeckyl, to whom, in such mad haste, you have given over the care of your children? An accomplished English lady?"

Is that the extent of your knowledge? Did you ever hear of her before to-day?"

"Go on, Uncle John! Go on! I will try to be patient!" said Mrs. Dainty, leaning back in her chair and forcing to her lips a smile of resignation.

"A fig for your patience! Answer me in reason!" retorted the old gentleman.

"I will when I make you my father confessor; but not before. I have no need at present for such a ghostly appendage."

In this spirit the controversy went on for more than half an hour, no advantage whatever being gained by Uncle John. Mrs. Dainty said that she had tried a governess of his selection, and tried her faithfully; and now she was going to try one of her own choosing, and, if he talked until doomsday, it would not, in the smallest degree, affect her purposes in the case.

Most reluctantly did Mr. Fleetwood consent to abandon the argument. He felt that too much was at stake. But a woman's will in the case was altogether too strong for him. Mrs. Dainty had made up her mind to have her own way, and all remonstrance, argument, and persuasion went with her for nothing.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEMON UNVEILED.

“Such a scene as I have had with that meddlesome old uncle of mine!” said Mrs. Dainty to Mrs. Jeckyl. The two ladies met in the room of the latter, whither Mrs. Dainty repaired as soon as Mr. Fleetwood, hopeless of gaining any influence over her, had retired, discomfited, from the field of controversy.

“On what subject?” inquired the new governess.

“Oh, about you!” said Mrs. Dainty.

“About me? What about me?” The small, gray eyes of Mrs. Jeckyl lightened.

“I told you that Miss Harper, that abominable girl I sent off to-day, was a pet of his.”

“Ah, yes; I remember. Well, there’s one thing very certain, madam: he’ll find no pet or plaything in me!” There was the look of an ogre in the woman’s skinny face. “I met him on the stairs an hour ago: one glance told me his character. I read him like a book.”

“How did you read him?” asked Mrs. Dainty.

“He’s an old cot-betty! A thing I despise!” said Mrs. Jeckyl, with contempt.

“He’s kind-hearted.” Mrs. Dainty uttered a word of apology for Uncle John. It came from her lips almost unbidden.

“Kind-hearted! Any fool may be kind-hearted,” said Mrs. Jeckyl, “and yet be very annoying in his folly. I never had much fancy for what are called kind-hearted people by way of apology for a thousand annoying vices and defects of character.”

“Uncle John has few defects of character, and no vices.” Mrs. Dainty could not help this just defence of her excellent relative.

“By your own showing, madam,” said Mrs. Jeckyl, affecting a pleasant tone, “he is very much inclined to be meddlesome in your affairs: that I call a vice. If you think the appellation too severe, you can call the peculiarity by another name. I can’t tolerate such men!”

“I don’t ask your toleration of him. Only avoid, if possible, giving offence. For my mother’s sake, if not for his own, I must bear with him and treat him with all considerate kindness.”

“I’ll manage him,” said Mrs. Jeckyl. “So don’t give yourself any trouble about his interference with my duties or privileges in the house.”

There was considerable modification in the tone and manner of Mrs. Jeckyl. She saw that she had shown her rough side a little too plainly, and that there were reasons why Mrs. Dainty could not ignore Uncle John altogether.

“You must bear as kindly as possible with his peculiarities. He means well,” said Mrs. Dainty, as a very feeling sense of her many obligations to Uncle John, past, present, and to come, grew distinct in her mind.

“He won’t trouble me any.” Mrs. Jeckyl smiled in a lamb-like way,—or, rather, tried so to smile. But the effort was one so unusual to her that she failed in the result; and Mrs. Dainty was in some doubt as to the meaning of the curious expression that came into the woman’s face. She had visited the room of Mrs. Jeckyl for the purpose of having a very free talk about Uncle John, and also for the purpose of settling with that lady some very decided plans of operation in regard to him. But the spirit in which Mrs. Jeckyl showed herself disposed to act rather cooled her ardor, and set her to thinking in a new direction.

The conference closed almost abruptly, and little to the satisfaction of either party. Mrs. Dainty more than half repented of her hasty action in taking this strange woman into the house and giving over her children to a guardianship and an influence that might be for evil instead of good. When her husband questioned her, she put as bold a face upon the matter as was possible,—denouncing Miss Harper in unmeasured terms, and extolling the

educated, accomplished English lady whom she had been so fortunate as to secure in her place.

“It is best, sometimes, to let well-enough alone,” said Mr. Dainty, on learning from his wife the change she had seen proper to make in a matter of so much importance. “And I think Miss Harper was at least well enough.”

This was all he remarked, and Mrs. Dainty saw it best to leave the matter, so far as he was concerned, just there. His easy indifference left her generally free to do about as she pleased: so, whenever he failed of prompt acquiescence in any course she designed to take, she pursued the easy policy of not disturbing his mind on the subject.

“Oh, she’s hateful! I’ll get a gun and shoot her!” It was little George who thus freely expressed his indignant appreciation of the new governess. He was talking to Madeline; and they were near enough to their mother’s door to be heard distinctly.

“I wish Miss Harper was back again,” said Madeline. Her voice had a mournful sound in the ears of Mrs. Dainty. “I loved her so.”

“Miss Harper was good, but this old woman is hateful. What made you sit in her lap and lean your head against her?”

“I don’t know. I couldn’t help it,” replied Madeline, still speaking in a kind of plaintive way. “I wish mother would send her out of the house. I’m afraid of her.”

“I’m not afraid of her!” spoke out little George, boldly. “And I don’t mean to say a single lesson.”

“That won’t be right,” said Madeline. “She is our teacher, you know.”

“She isn’t my teacher if I don’t choose; and I don’t choose,” responded young America. “I’ll say my lessons to Miss Harper; and I won’t say them to anybody else.”

“Madeline dear!” It was a new voice among the interlocutors, and the tones send a strange thrill among the nerves of Mrs. Dainty.

All was silent for some moments. The presence of the new-comer seemed to have thrown a spell over the children.

“Come, dear; I want to show you something beautiful I have in my room.”

Mrs. Dainty sat breathlessly still, listening. There was the sound as of a child rising slowly from the floor.

“Come, George.” It was the same voice.

“A’n’t a-going to!” was the quick, sturdy reply.

“Yes, George; come. I’ve got some beautiful things up in my room.”

“Don’t go, Madeline!” said George. “She’s got a snake up there, and it’ll bite you! I saw it as I passed her door!”

“You wicked little wretch!” exclaimed Mrs. Jeckyl, thrown for a moment off her guard. “How dare you utter such a falsehood?”

“Mother!” It was the voice of Madeline, and its low tones came to Mrs. Dainty’s ears with such an appealing fear in them that she repressed only by a strong effort an impulse to rush forth into the passage and catch the child up in her arms. But she sat still and listened.

“Don’t go, Maddy!” persisted George, nothing daunted. “She *has* got a snake there. I saw it.”

A wild cry of fear now broke from the lips of Madeline, that went thrilling through the house. Mrs. Dainty sprung from her room and caught the child from Mrs. Jeckyl’s grasp. As she did so, Madeline shrunk against and clung to her, while her whole frame quivered as you have felt a bird quiver in your hand.

“What ails you, dear?” Mrs. Dainty laid her face down upon the child’s face, and spoke very tenderly.

“It’s that wicked little boy of yours,” said Mrs. Jeckyl, “who has been frightening her with the story of a snake in my room. How dare you do so, sir?”

“Well, so you have!” persisted little Don’t Care. “I saw it. There it is now, in your bosom! See! If its head isn’t peeping out alongside of your neck!”

It was now Mrs. Jeckyl’s turn to start and look frightened. So natural and earnest was the boy’s tones, that even she was for a moment deceived, and clutched convulsively at the imaginary snake.

“Too bad!” she exclaimed, recovering herself. “Too bad!”

Others soon joined the little group at the door of Mrs. Dainty’s chamber; for the cry of Madeline had reached every ear in the dwelling. Among the first to arrive was Uncle John.

“She did it!” cried George, pointing to Mrs. Jeckyl. “She did it!”

“Did what?” asked Uncle John.

“Frightened Maddy! She’s got a snake in her bosom! Take care!”

“A snake!” Uncle John looked puzzled.

“I saw it in her room; and she’s got it in her bosom now,” persisted the little fellow, quite delighted in observing the storm he had raised, and more delighted at the discomfiture of the enemy.

“You wicked little wretch!” exclaimed Mrs. Jeckyl, advancing toward the boy.

George glided behind Uncle John, and, peering out from his place of refuge, made a new attack.

“They’re in her eyes now! Don’t let her come near you, sister Aggy! Take care, papa! *Old snake!* She’s the mother of snakes! See! They’re crawling all over her!”

A tiger about to spring upon his victim could not have glared with two more cruel eyes than those that sought the form of little George.

“Silence!” cried Mr. Dainty, who had joined the excited company. “Silence!” he repeated, sternly, as George attempted to speak again. “What does all this mean?”

“It simply means,” said Mrs. Jeckyl, with forced composure, “that this little boy of yours has frightened his sister with an improbable story of a snake in my room. He seems to have a fruitful imagination, as he now multiplies the snake by a score, and covers my body with them.”

Uncle John now observed Madeline, who stood with her face hidden upon her mother’s bosom, and shrinking very closely to her, turn her head slowly and look at Mrs. Jeckyl. Her countenance was pale, and her eyes had a strange—almost terrified—expression. She gave only a single glance, and then hid her face again, while a low shudder was seen pervading her body.

“It is plain,” said Uncle John, taking advantage of the singular state of affairs presented, and addressing the new governess, “that your efforts to gain influence over these children have been unsuccessful, and that, judging from the present state of affairs, such efforts in the future will be hopeless. My advice to you, therefore, is to retire immediately.”

“I have no knowledge of you, sir, in the case,” replied Mrs. Jeckyl, growing at once self-possessed, and speaking with dignity. “I am here, under regular engagement with Mrs. Dainty, to perform a service to her children, for which I hold myself entirely competent, and to recede from which under the reaction of simple child’s-play like this I am not in the least inclined. Am I covered with snakes, sir?”

“Not literally,” replied Uncle John.

“Not literally! What am I to understand, sir, by your words?”

“Simply the meaning they convey to your mind. Nothing more.”

“Are there snakes in my eyes?” The woman was losing her forced composure.

“Say yes, Uncle John! Say yes!” spoke out little George.

“If you look into a mirror, you can see for yourself,” replied the old gentleman, who, now that he had come fairly into conflict with the stranger, determined to adopt any mode of warfare that would drive her from the house. “I don’t wonder that you frightened Madeline.”

“Uncle John!” Mrs. Dainty now made a feeble effort to speak in favor of her new governess. “This is insufferable! Am I to have no control in my own house? Are people to be insulted——”

“Oh, mother! mother! send her away!”

It was Madeline who interrupted Mrs. Dainty, as she lifted her face with a look of such pleading fear that it checked her utterance. And the shudder that thrilled the child’s frame was so strong that it sent the blood coldly to her mother’s heart.

“Madam!” (Mr. Dainty now assumed the controlling power, and spoke to Mrs. Jeckyl like a man who was in earnest,) “after this scene you cannot remain here in any comfort to yourself, nor in any acceptance in our family. I beg you, therefore, to retire from the house, and at once.”

“Sir——” Mrs. Jeckyl made an effort to reply, but Mr. Dainty would have no parley with her. “Madeline,” he said, laying his hand upon his wife and speaking very firmly, “go into your room with Maddy and George; and you, Agnes, leave us.”

There was no hesitation on the part of any thus addressed, for all, except George, were more than glad to get out of the presence of Mrs. Jeckyl. He, —little rebel!—as he went at his father’s bidding, looked back over his shoulder, and called out,—

“Snakes! Snakes!”

As soon as Mrs. Jeckyl was alone with Mr. Dainty and Uncle John, and found herself without any chance of holding the place she was in reality particularly desirous to retain, she gave full course to her indignant feelings, and for some minutes poured forth a torrent of mad invective. Not a single word was said in reply; and so, like one beating the air, she soon exhausted herself. Her departure was like the lifting of a storm-cloud from the dwelling of Mr. Dainty; but the storm did not pass without leaving some traces of its evil work. Scarcely had Mr. Dainty seen this woman beyond the threshold, ere he was startled by a cry of distress from his wife, and the eager calling of his name. On reaching the chamber from which her voice came, he saw Madeline lying upon the bed, pale and deathly in appearance;

and when he laid his hands upon her he found that she was rigid and insensible.

CHAPTER XII.

A FEARFUL MYSTERY.

The family physician, who was hurriedly summoned to the strangely-affected child, entered the dwelling of Mr. Dainty in about thirty minutes after the departure of Mrs. Jeckyl. He found Madeline showing a few signs of returning animation, but not of conscious life. Her face was still of an ashen hue, and its expression painful to look upon. At first he asked no questions, endeavoring, by an observation of her symptoms, to comprehend the case. He soon saw that extraordinary causes had been at work, and that the child's condition was one not to be reached through ordinary treatment. After looking at her for some minutes, and examining all the life-indications, he said, turning to Mr. Dainty,—

“How long has she been in this state?”

“More than half an hour.”

“What produced it?”

“I am not able to answer your question,—at least, not satisfactorily. To me her state is unaccountable.”

“Had she a fall, or a fright?” asked the physician.

“Neither. And yet her mind was seriously disturbed.”

“By what?”

“I can scarcely explain, for I am in doubt myself.”

“Perhaps your wife can answer my questions more clearly.” And the physician addressed himself to Mrs. Dainty. But the mother was silent. To her mind there was a deep mystery in the affair. That Madeline's state was, in some way, dependent upon Mrs. Jeckyl's influence over her, she had a vague conviction. But as to the manner and meaning of this influence she was in total ignorance.

“Will you inform me, as briefly as possible, as to the condition of things existing at the time this partial suspension of life took place?”

The physician addressed Mrs. Dainty.

“I think she was frightened at something said by George,” Mrs. Dainty answered.

“What was that something?”

“He said that our governess had a snake in her bosom, and that snakes were crawling all over her.”

The doctor looked thoughtfully upon the floor, and waited for additional information. But Mrs. Dainty said nothing further. Little George was standing close to the bedside. As the doctor raised his head, his eyes rested upon the boy’s face.

“I think,” he said, as he looked at the bright-eyed child, “that you must have seen very sharp to find serpents about Miss Harper.”

“Oh, it wasn’t Miss Harper!” replied the boy, in a quick tone: “she’s lovely!”

“Who, then, was it? I thought Miss Harper was governess to your children?” And the physician turned to Mrs. Dainty.

“No, sir; Miss Harper is no longer the governess of my children.”

There was a certain coldness of manner about Mrs. Dainty that was meant to repress inquiry on this particular subject.

“I hope, madam,” said the doctor, speaking with some earnestness, and a little severity of tone, “that you will be as unreserved as possible in your communications. Unless I have all the information in regard to the cause of Madeline’s illness that it is in your power to give me, it will be impossible to prescribe intelligently, or with any hope of reaching the case. Miss Harper, I understand, then, was not the person to whom your little son referred as having a snake in her bosom?”

As Mrs. Dainty did not reply immediately, Uncle John spoke out in his blunt way, and right to the purpose, saying,—

“No, it was not Miss Harper, but a wicked old hag that my niece picked up somewhere. If I had any faith in witchcraft, I would believe that she had laid a spell on Madeline.”

The doctor now turned to Uncle John.

“When did this new governess of whom you speak come into the family?”

“To-day.”

“Only to-day?”

“She came into the house only a few hours ago.”

“Was Madeline well this morning?”

“Perfectly.”

“This is a sudden illness, then?”

“So I understand it,” replied Uncle John. “How is it, Agnes?” And he spoke to the sister of Madeline, who was leaning over the bed, gazing with wet eyes upon her pallid face. “Did Madeline show any symptoms of illness before this sudden attack?”

“She has acted strangely ever since Mrs. Jeckyl came into the house.”

“Mrs. Jeckyl!” said the physician, in a tone of surprise.

The eyes of all turned quickly to his face with looks of inquiry.

“Do you know this woman?” asked Mr. Dainty.

“I am not certain. But I think I have heard the name before.” There was an air of evasion about the doctor.

“She is an Englishwoman,” remarked Mr. Fleetwood.

The doctor looked at Agnes, and pursued his inquiries.

“Acted strangely, you say. In what respect?”

“I can hardly explain, sir,” replied Agnes. “But I have heard tell of birds being charmed by serpents; and the way Madeline acted toward Mrs. Jeckyl made me think all the while of a bird and a serpent. I do not much wonder that Georgie saw snakes in her eyes. They were the strangest eyes I ever looked into, and made me shudder. She’s done something dreadful to Madeline!”

“Were they alone together?” inquired the physician.

“For a little while.”

“Did Madeline seem repelled, or attracted, by this woman?”

“Both. She appeared to be drawn toward her, yet acted like one struggling to get away. Oh, sir, it was dreadful! I never met so terrible a woman! Her eyes shone, sometimes, like coals of fire. I was afraid of her.”

“Did you see her put her hands on Madeline?”

“Yes, sir.”

“In what manner?”

“She held her with one hand, while with the other she smoothed her hair.”

“Did Madeline try to get away?”

“At first she did; but after a while all her struggles ceased, and she laid her head back against her, half shutting her eyes, and looking like one just going to sleep.”

The doctor’s countenance assumed a still graver aspect.

“Was this woman an entire stranger?” he asked, in tones of surprise, turning to Mrs. Dainty.

“She came highly recommended by Mrs. Ashton, as an accomplished Englishwoman, the widow of a distinguished officer who died in the service of the East India Company.”

“Her own story, I suppose, believed by Mrs. Ashton without evidence. And on this slight knowledge of the woman you placed these tender, impressible children under her control!”

And the doctor shook his head ominously.

“There has been harm done here,” he added, “beyond my skill to cure.”

“What harm?” Mrs. Dainty’s face grew suddenly as pale as the face of her unconscious child.

“Do you not know, madam,” said the doctor, “that there are men and women at this day who possess an evil power over the minds of those who submit themselves to their influence, stronger than even the witch of Endor possessed of old,—persons in mysterious league with evil spirits, who delight through them to break down the soul’s God-given freedom and make it the slave of their will? If this were my child, I would rather a thousand times see her pass upward into heaven than live on here exposed to the assaults of infernal spirits, who, in my opinion, have gained admittance to her through this evil woman’s power!”

“Doctor,” said Mr. Fleetwood, laying his hand upon the physician’s arm with some firmness of clasp, “no more of that, if you please! It is neither the time nor the place!”

“I stand rebuked,” answered the doctor. “But I feel strongly on this subject, and am apt to speak warmly.”

“Time is passing,” said Mr. Fleetwood, “and every moment is precious. This child needs your most skilful attention. I think you understand her case as fully as it can be understood through any further explanation at this time. We place her in your hands. Do for her to the utmost of your skill.”

CHAPTER XIII.

DOUBT AND ANXIETY.

It was nearly two hours from the time the physician entered the house of Mr. Dainty before he retired, and then the night had fallen. He left Madeline in a natural slumber, and with her pulses beating evenly. She had recovered from her almost cataleptic condition with the rapidity of one awakening, and showed a tranquil rather than disturbed state of mind. The presence of the doctor seemed a little to surprise her, and she asked, as she looked from face to face, who had been sick. Soon after, like one overwearied, she sunk into a gentle sleep.

Before retiring from the house, the physician had a long conversation with Mr. Dainty and Mr. Fleetwood, in which he gave it as his opinion that Mrs. Jeckyl had attempted to gain a mesmeric influence over Madeline, and with a successful result that it was frightful to contemplate.

“She looked to me like a very fiend incarnate,” said Mr. Fleetwood. “I can believe any thing against her as to evil purpose; but I am hardly prepared to reach your conclusion in the case.”

“Has the child ever shown symptoms of nervous disease at all resembling her present affection?”

“Never,” replied Mr. Dainty.

“You heard Agnes describe the way in which she acted toward this woman?”

“Yes.”

“Was it not remarkable?”

“Very.”

“Have you any theory in regard to it different from mine?”

“I have no theory on the subject,” said Mr. Dainty. “The whole thing is beyond my reach.”

“Are you familiar with these modern phenomena, which some call, oddly enough, spiritualism?”

A look of disgust came into the face of Mr. Dainty, as he answered,—

“No.”

“If you were familiar with them, either from reading or observation,” said the doctor, “you might be inclined to think as I do touching your daughter’s sudden terror, which was followed by so deep a prostration of mind and body.”

“Her imagination,” said Mr. Fleetwood, “is no doubt far more active than we had supposed, and she may have an idiosyncrasy in regard to snakes which threw her into a condition of paralyzing terror when George declared that the woman had serpents crawling all over her. I am sure that her eyes were remarkably snaky at the time. This, to me, is a more intelligible explanation.”

The doctor did not urge his view of the case, although his response to Mr. Fleetwood was not of a character to show any leaning, on his part, to that gentleman’s opinion. After charging them to keep Madeline as free as possible from all disturbing influences, he went away, promising to call in the morning.

Before making his visit to the house of Mr. Dainty on the next day, the doctor, whose mind had become very much interested in Madeline’s case, called to see Mrs. Ashton, whom he knew very well. After making a few friendly inquiries about her family, he said,—

“You recommended to Mrs. Dainty an Englishwoman as a suitable person to take the place of governess to her children?”

An expression of surprise came into the face of Mrs. Ashton, as she answered,—

“I have not the pleasure of an acquaintance with Mrs. Dainty.”

For a moment the doctor looked puzzled. Before he had time to put another question, Mrs. Ashton said,—

“There is an Englishwoman named Jeckyl——”

“The same! What do you know of her?” The doctor spoke quickly, interrupting the lady.

“Very little,” replied Mrs. Ashton. “But why do you question me in regard to this woman, Dr. Edmonson?”

“Mrs. Dainty engaged her on your recommendation.”

“On my recommendation!”

“Yes.”

“In the first place, doctor, I don’t know Mrs. Dainty, except by sight; and, in the second place, I have never recommended Mrs. Jeckyl to anybody.”

“There has been some deception, then,” said Dr. Edmonson.

“There certainly has, if I have been made to endorse the woman. I did speak of her, to one or two persons, as an Englishwoman who desired to get the situation of governess, and I may have spoken of her as educated and accomplished,—not so much from my knowledge of her acquirements as from her own testimony in the case. And now I remember that somebody told me that Mrs. Dainty was about changing her governess, and that I mentioned this to Mrs. Jeckyl and advised her to see about the matter. This is the utmost of my doings in the case.”

“What is your impression of the woman?” inquired the doctor.

“Not particularly favorable,” said Mrs. Ashton. “I can hardly tell how she got access to my family in the beginning. At first I pitied her lonely and almost helpless condition in a strange country, and felt some interest in her; but this interest has steadily diminished, until now the woman is so repulsive that I can scarcely endure her presence.”

“And this is all you know of her?”

“All; and I am pained to think that she has been received into any family on my supposed recommendation. I should not like her to have a controlling influence over my children. But pray, doctor, what has happened in connection with her and Mrs. Dainty’s family? I hope she has not been robbing them, or any thing of that kind?”

“Nothing of that kind,” answered the doctor. “But I’m afraid she has been attempting mesmeric influence over one of Mrs. Dainty’s children.”

“Dr. Edmonson!”

There was about Mrs. Ashton a peculiar tone and manner that excited the doctor’s curiosity.

“Are you aware that she possesses any power of this kind?”

“Your question throws a flood of light into my mind,” said Mrs. Ashton, “and gives, I think, the key to a singular fact that has always puzzled me. On occasion of one of Mrs. Jeckyl’s visits here, my little Emmeline was suffering with a sick headache. You know how much she has been troubled with these headaches. She was lying on the sofa, with pale face, and red, suffused eyes, when this woman came in. Seeing that Emmeline was sick, she made a number of inquiries about her, and then, sitting down by the sofa, laid her hand, with a light pressure, as I could see, upon her head. ‘Poor child!’ she murmured, and then began stroking her hair. I noticed that she bent down and looked very intently into her face. I thought her manner a little curious, but did not regard it as significant of any thing unusual. This result followed: Emmeline, in less than two minutes, closed her eyes and went off into a deep sleep, which lasted over an hour, or until Mrs. Jeckyl ended her visit. On rising to go, she referred to the child, and, leaning over her, moved her hand, in what struck me as a singular way, over her face. Emmeline roused up instantly. ‘How does your head feel, dear?’ asked this woman. ‘It does not ache any,’ was answered. ‘I thought you would be better,’ said Mrs. Jeckyl, as if speaking to herself. Once or twice since, in thinking of this incident, I have had a vague impression that the sleep of Emmeline on that occasion was not a natural one, and that it depended, in some way, on the act of Mrs. Jeckyl.”

“I have no doubt of it,” said Dr. Edmonson.

“You have not?”

“No: evidently the woman transferred, for the time, some will-force of her own to the child, producing temporary unconsciousness. Her spirit overshadowed the helpless little one.”

The words of Dr. Edmonson sent a shudder along the nerves of Mrs. Ashton.

“You frighten me!” she said.

“You have cause to be frightened. When half-insane men and women step beyond the orderly course of natural life and invoke powers of evil—for all things disorderly are evil—to enable them to exercise a mysterious and controlling influence over their weaker fellow men and women, there is subtle danger abroad, more fearful in its effects than the invisible pestilence walking in darkness and wasting at noonday. It is no light thing, Mrs. Ashton, to disturb the divine harmonies of the human soul,—to thrust an impious hand boldly down among its hidden strings! I am amazed at the folly and weakness that prevail on this subject,—at the singular infatuation of well-meaning persons, who permit themselves to become the instruments of invisible powers and influences the quality of which even the feeblest reason might determine. To hear some of these persons talk confidently, and with self-satisfied tone and countenance, about penetrating the arcana of the spiritual world, excites my mirth sometimes, but oftener affects me with sadness.”

“I have two or three friends,” said Mrs. Ashton, “who have been carried away by these things, and their lapse from reason has caused me deep regret.”

“You rightly designate their state of mind,” replied the doctor, “as a lapse from reason. No mind possessing a *true rational balance* is in any danger of falling from its mountain-height and crystal atmosphere, where every thing is seen in its true relation, down into this miry valley, where the thick atmosphere distorts every object and mirage adds its mocking illusions. I am in no wonder at the result,—at toppling reason, lapsing virtue, desolated homes! Every tree may be known by its fruit; and the product of this has shown itself to be evil from rind to core!

“Never again, Mrs. Ashton, permit this woman Jeckyl to darken your chambers with the shadow of her presence. If she have once brought your little Emmeline under this direful influence of which we are speaking, she has disturbed the natural order of her mind and gained a certain power over her. A second trance will be induced more easily than the first. Even by her serpent-eye she may cast on her a spell.”

Mrs. Ashton grew pale and shuddered.

“I warn you in plain words,” added the doctor, “speaking as I think, and from a solemn sense of duty. Mrs. Jeckyl, if I am to judge by the way in which her presence and active sphere affected one of Mrs. Dainty’s children, has a potency of will almost irresistible. In Madeline’s efforts at resistance—for she manifested from the very beginning an intense repugnance toward the woman—she was thrown into a condition of trance profound almost as death. The state in which I discovered her, when summoned by the family, was not that of an ordinary suspension of vital powers. I saw in an instant that extraordinary causes had been at work. And I now fully comprehend the case. There has been a disturbance of the order of that child’s life that may never be corrected. Ah, Mrs. Ashton, a mother can never be too careful in the selection of those who are to be the daily companions, and, I might say, educators, of her children!”

From the house of Mrs. Ashton, Dr. Edmonson went to Mrs. Dainty’s. He found Madeline as well, apparently, as usual, and her mother’s cheerfulness restored. He made an effort to startle her mind with a clear apprehension of the danger through which the child had just passed, but only partially succeeded. Mrs. Dainty hadn’t much faith, she said, in the strange stories told about the power of mesmerists, and considered nine-tenths of the alleged phenomena as sheer delusion. She could understand how Madeline’s repugnance to Mrs. Jeckyl might have been so strong as to produce vital suspension for a period; but that Mrs. Jeckyl had gained any power over her was a thing not to be admitted for a moment.

The doctor observed Madeline very closely, and was satisfied that a change had taken place.

“Did you sleep well last night?” he inquired of her.

“Not very well,” was answered.

“Why?”

“I had ugly dreams, that waked me up.”

“Often?”

“Two or three times.”

“What did you dream about?”

“I don’t know.”

“Try if you can remember one of your dreams.”

“I fell into the water once,” said Madeline.

“And that woke you?”

“No, sir; but I thought that Mrs. Jeckyl tried to push me under, and that made me wake up.”

The doctor looked very earnestly into Madeline’s face. Its expression troubled him.

“Can you remember another dream?”

“No, sir; I can’t remember any more.”

“You may be thankful, Mrs. Dainty,” said Dr. Edmonson, “that circumstances so soon showed the character of this woman. The harm she might have done your children is inconceivable.”

“I think you put too serious a face upon the matter, doctor,” replied Mrs. Dainty.

“Time, I fear, will tell you a different story,” said the doctor, as he arose to depart. “For the present let me enjoin upon you to keep this child as free as possible from all disturbing causes.”

Mrs. Dainty made no answer, and the doctor, bowing almost formally, bade her good-morning.

CHAPTER XIV. PAINFUL CONSEQUENCES.

“Madeline.”

Mrs. Dainty looked up, a slight expression of annoyance coming into her face: Uncle John stood before her.

“Well? What is it?” She did not speak with an air of encouragement; nor did she by look or motion give the old gentleman an invitation to sit down. He had entered the library, where she was reading.

“I want to have a talk with you about the children,” said Mr. Fleetwood. He was altogether self-possessed, and his tone and manner were earnest.

A deeper shade of annoyance passed over the countenance of Mrs. Dainty.

“You still purpose having a governess?”

“I don’t know that I purpose any thing,” replied Mrs. Dainty. “I’ve had such wretched luck, so far, with governesses, that I shall hardly feel safe in trying another.”

“Why not recall Miss Harper?” said Mr. Fleetwood.

“Uncle John!” Mrs. Dainty turned upon the old gentleman a look of indignant surprise.

“The children are all attached to her; and she is pure-minded, true-hearted, and——”

“She’s insolent and upstart!” retorted Mrs. Dainty, with passion; “and I will never have her back in her old place.”

“You have altogether misapprehended Florence,” urged Mr. Fleetwood, with unusual earnestness of manner.

“I am not apt to misapprehend people,” said Mrs. Dainty, drawing her head up a little proudly.

“Have you noticed Madeline particularly, during the last few days?” inquired Mr. Fleetwood, after a pause.

“Particularly? How?” Mrs. Dainty looked curiously at the old gentleman.

“Do you see no change in her since that remarkable experience with Mrs. Jeckyl?”

“No,” was answered, without hesitation.

“I have.”

“Indeed! you are sharp-sighted, Uncle John!” Mrs. Dainty spoke lightly.

“Love is always sharp-sighted when danger is about,” was sententiously answered.

“You are fanciful.”

“No, Madeline!” The countenance of Mr. Fleetwood became still more serious. “No, Madeline; I am not a dealer in light fancies, but a man of sober thoughts and direct purposes, as you have reason to know. There is a change in our little pet, and one boding, I fear, unhappy consequences, unless she is at once surrounded by counteracting influences. The spirit of that bad woman, in overshadowing her, left something of its darkness on her young spirit.”

Mrs. Dainty sighed unconsciously.

“What is the change you have observed, Uncle John?” she said, her repellent manner subsiding.

“Do you remember to have heard her merry laugh ringing through the house as of old?”

Mrs. Dainty thought for a moment or two, and then replied,—

“I do not.”

“Do you know where she is now?”

“No.”

“Come with me.”

The old gentleman arose, and moved toward the library-door. His niece followed him, with a look of questioning interest on her countenance.

“Where is she?” The mother spoke in a whisper.

“Step softly,” said Mr. Fleetwood.

From the library they went noiselessly up to the nursery.

“See!” And the old gentleman directed the attention of his niece to Madeline, who was sitting there alone, her back to the door, silent and motionless.

“She is reading,” whispered the mother.

Uncle John shook his head.

“Madeline!” Mrs. Dainty could not repress the impulse to speak.

The child started up and turned with something of a frightened look toward the door.

“What are you doing here all alone?” asked Mrs. Dainty.

“Nothing,” answered the child, looking confused.

“Nothing?”

“No, ma’am.”

“How long have you been here alone?”

“I don’t know.”

“Come down with me to the library.”

“I’d rather stay here,” replied Madeline.

“And I’d rather have you in the library,” said Mrs. Dainty, with an air of impatience.

“I wasn’t doing any thing,” urged Madeline.

“I didn’t say that you were. But that doesn’t signify. Come down into the library.”

“I don’t want to go down into the library.”

“Come! Do you hear me?”

But Madeline stirred not.

Mrs. Dainty was about starting forward to grasp the child’s arm and constrain obedience, when Uncle John held her back, whispering,—

“Patience! patience! Remember that you are now dealing with a diseased mind instead of a healthy one. There is something wrong about the child, and, if you love her, be prudent.”

“You deal in riddles,” said Mrs. Dainty, yielding to the constraining force of Uncle John. “Disobedience, it strikes me, is a disease that should be dealt with promptly.” She spoke in a whisper.

“Madeline!” There was a winning tenderness in the old man’s voice that found its way to the child’s heart, for she moved toward Uncle John and grasped his outstretched hand. The moment she felt its warm pressure, she shrunk close to his side, while a pleasant change in her young face revealed the change which had come over her spirit.

“I want you in the library,” said Mrs. Dainty, firmly. She did not think it right to let the child have her own way.

“Come,” Uncle John spoke, cheerfully; and moving away, Madeline followed without resistance.

But Mrs. Dainty failed altogether in awakening an interest in the child’s mind. Uncle John, thinking it best to leave them alone for a time, withdrew from the library. The mother, on whose mind a pressure of concern had fallen, took down a large volume of natural history, filled with costly

engravings, and, opening it on a table, drew Madeline's attention to the pictures.

"Isn't this beautiful?" she said, pausing over a group of exquisitely-colored birds.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the child, in a tone that betrayed an entire lack of interest.

"Humming-birds! Oh, how beautiful!" The tones of Mrs. Dainty's voice were animated. "This one with golden wings and emerald-green bosom is like the darling wee bird we saw this spring, fluttering among the honeysuckle-leaves in the garden. Isn't it sweet?"

"Yes, ma'am."

There was not a ripple of interest in Madeline's voice.

"Don't you like birds?" inquired the disappointed mother.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Here are two beautiful doves. How lifelike! It seems every moment as if they would fly away! A'n't they lovely, dear?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Mrs. Dainty bent down and looked into the child's face. Her eyes were not on the book, but cast dreamily to the floor, and there was in her countenance a sad expression.

"Madeline!" Mrs. Dainty spoke with a suddenness that caused her child to start and the varying color to dance over her face.

"What do you mean by this? I don't understand you!" Mrs. Dainty's mind was growing confused through impatience.

For an instant Madeline looked frightened, and then burst into tears.

"What are you crying about, silly child? What ails you?"

Madeline answered nothing, but wept more violently.

“Are you sick?”

“No, ma’am,” sobbed the unhappy child.

“What’s the matter with you, then?”

“I don’t know.”

“Crying like a baby, and don’t know for what? Shame on you!”

Madeline moved away from her mother’s side, as if a hand had been suddenly pressed against her.

“Come, now! There’s been enough of this! Dry up your tears at once, and be a good girl! Here! Let me wipe them all away.”

And she caught Madeline with one hand, while with the other she held a handkerchief to her eyes. But the fountain of tears was not so easily dried up. Madeline wept on, sobbing in a wild, convulsed manner.

“I’m out of all patience!” exclaimed Mrs. Dainty. Her mind, instead of getting clearer, was becoming more and more clouded by passion. “If you don’t stop this crying for nothing, I’ll punish you! Hush, I say!”

There was an instant of strong agitation, as if the will of the child were contending vigorously with an almost overpowering flood of emotion; and then all was still as death. Madeline stood motionless, and silent as a statue.

“Very well,” said Mrs. Dainty, coldly; “I’m glad to see that you can obey if you will, and I look to having no more annoyances of this kind. Go and sit down, or amuse yourself in some way.”

But Madeline did not stir.

“Do you hear me?” Mrs. Dainty spoke sharply.

Still the child stood motionless.

“Madeline!”

No response.

“Don’t trifle with me, child!”

The stern, threatening voice uttered its injunction in vain.

“Madeline! Answer me, or I will punish you severely.”

The mother had raised her hand to strike a blow, when Mr. Fleetwood, who remained near the library-door, came in hastily, and with a look and gesture warned her against that extremity.

“Uncle John!” exclaimed the excited woman, losing all patience, “I wish you would mind your own business, and not interfere with me. You only encourage this self-willed child in her spirit of disobedience!”

And before Mr. Fleetwood had time to reply she caught Madeline by the arm, and dragged her from the library, and through the passages to her own apartment, the door of which she closed and locked.

“You’ll find that I’m in earnest!” she exclaimed, in a husky but determined voice, as she hurried Madeline across the room. Seating herself, she drew the child close in front of her, and, looking steadily into her face, said,—

“Speak! What do you mean by this conduct?”

The aspect of Madeline’s face, as it now appeared in the eyes of Mrs. Dainty, was so strange that alarm took the place of anger. All life seemed to have receded therefrom. The blue lips stood apart, the eyes were wide open, almost staring, the skin was of an ashen hue. Lifting her quickly from the floor, the mother laid her child upon a bed, and, after bending over her a few moments anxiously, went to the door and called Mr. Fleetwood.

“I warned you,” said the old gentleman, in a reproving voice, as he saw the child’s condition. “I told you that you were dealing with a diseased mind!”

“What *can* ail her? Oh, Uncle John, send at once for the doctor!” Mrs. Dainty wrung her hands, and stood glancing from Madeline to Mr. Fleetwood, her countenance pale with fear.

The old gentleman bent down over the child, laying his hand upon her forehead and breast, and then searching along her wrists with his fingers. Her flesh was cold, and damp with perspiration, and there was so feeble a

motion in the heart that scarcely a wave of life could be felt along the arteries.

“Oh, send for the doctor! She may die!” Mrs. Dainty was overwhelmed with distress.

“Be patient. Control yourself, Madeline.” Uncle John spoke with unusual calmness. “Get cold water and bathe her forehead and temples.”

This was done, and signs of more active life followed. A warmer color returned to her cheeks; respiration became deeper; the half-opened eyes closed, giving the look of sleep, instead of death, to her childish face.

“What is the meaning of this? What has come over the child?” said Mrs. Dainty, breathing more freely as she saw that a new and healthier action had supervened: “I don’t understand it, Uncle John.”

“There is disease of the mind, Madeline, as I have been trying for the last hour to make you understand. Its exact nature cannot at once be determined. Neither anger nor force will avail any thing: of that be fully assured.”

“But, Uncle John, she must not be permitted to have her own will entirely. That leads to ruin.”

“Of course not. The government of love, wise and gentle in all its ministrations,—not the government of angry force,—must have rule. See into what a mental paralysis your efforts to compel submission have thrown her. If her mind’s condition had been a healthy one, this would never have occurred. Deal with her, then, wisely and gently, as you would deal with the sick.”

Mrs. Dainty sighed deeply, and looked troubled.

“What does it mean, Uncle John? What is the cause of this strange affection?”

“It was not so before Mrs. Jeckyl came into the house.”

Mrs. Dainty gave an unwilling assent.

“Something has been done to her by that woman. If I were a believer in witchcraft I would say that she had laid a spell upon the child; that Madeline was under the influence of an evil eye.”

“There is something wrong,” murmured Mrs. Dainty, speaking partly to herself,—“something wrong! I wish I had never seen that dreadful woman.” A low shudder pervaded her nerves.

“Yes, something very wrong,” said Mr. Fleetwood; “and it will require the wisest care on our part to restore the harmonious action of her life, so suddenly and so strangely disturbed.”

For nearly two hours Madeline lay in a deep sleep; and during all that time Mrs. Dainty sat by the bedside. When she awoke at last, her mind was in a tranquil state, like one coming out of a refreshing slumber. But she exhibited none of her old lightness of spirit,—was quiet, yet cheerful, rather than of pensive mood. She did not seem inclined to join, as of old, her little brother George, Master “Don’t Care,” in any of his sports, but rather shrunk away into unobserved places, sitting quiet and idle.

CHAPTER XV.

ALARMING OCCURRENCE.

Time made very little change in Madeline's state; no change, at least, for the better. Twice during the succeeding fortnight her mother's anger was excited against her, and the strong, passionate will of the one set itself vigorously to work to subdue the so-called "wilfulness" of the other. But each time the storm, like all storms, made itself felt only in wreck and ruin. Madeline, after the exhaustion of the wild strife of passion was over, showed a moody, absent exterior, and an increased tendency to be alone.

"What can ail the child?" Mrs. Dainty would say, in her uneasiness and perplexity, now appealing to her husband, and now to Uncle John. But from neither could any solution of the mystery of her strange state be derived. The family physician was called in and consulted, though with little satisfaction. "There must be a change for Madeline," he said. "Her mind must be diverted. She is in a morbid state;" with much more to the same purpose. Yet nothing was gained. The mental disease abated not, but commenced assuming new forms. Morbid desire began taking the place of morbid indifference; and, if this inordinate craving were not indulged, fits of nervous prostration followed the excitement of contention, resembling the stupor of opium.

It now became a matter of serious consideration in the family as to how Madeline was to be treated by the other members. Suddenly her will had grown exacting. The mild-tempered, gentle, loving little girl had become imperious, selfish, and demanding. If she desired a thing, or wished for an indulgence, no amount of opposition subdued her. Denial, argument, punishment, increased instead of weakening her purpose, and the certain result was a nervous spasm, or deep stupor, lasting at times for hours. So long as she had her own way, the current of her life glided along smoothly; but any obstruction swelled it into a turbulent flood, the dark depths of which were hidden from all eyes.

The doctor strongly recommended change of place, new associations. "Send her out in the carriage every day, or take her to the public squares for a ramble among the children," he would urge, when he saw her moving in her quiet way about the house, and marked the singular expression of her countenance, that had in it something almost weird.

One day Agnes, the elder sister, accompanied by George, had taken Madeline to the City Square through which they wandered for some time. Growing tired, the girls sat down to observe a party of little children who were jumping the rope, while George, boy-like, took a wide range over the grounds. Suddenly the attention of Agnes was called to Madeline by an exclamation, and, looking around and into her face, she saw that her eyes were fixed on some object with a look of fear. Following their direction, she saw at a short distance the repulsive form of Mrs. Jeckyl, who was standing perfectly still, gazing at them. Her first instinctive movement was to shade the eyes of Madeline with her hand and thus hide from her the form which had disturbed her with its presence. As she did so, Madeline shut her eyes and leaned her head back against her sister.

As soon as Mrs. Jeckyl saw that she was observed, she came forward, offering her hand to Agnes in a familiar way, and inquiring with an affectation of interest about the family.

"Ah," she continued, "and here is my little pet, Maddy!" placing her hand, as she spoke, on the head of Madeline, whose slight form quivered and shrunk at the touch.

"How are you, dear?" she asked, in tones meant to be winning.

But Madeline kept her face buried in her sister's garments.

"That little rebel brother tried to frighten my pet," she added, her hand still playing with the child's curls,— "the naughty boy! But Maddy was my jewel! Little darling! Come! Look up, and let me see, if only for a moment, that pair of bright eyes."

Agnes felt the head of Madeline slowly turning, as if she wished to get a stealthy glance at the woman's face.

“Ah! Peep-bo! Peep!” said Mrs. Jeckyl, playfully. “I thought the light would come.”

Madeline had taken a single look, and then hidden her face again.

“How have you been, darling?” Mrs. Jeckyl bent her head close down to the face of Madeline.

The child made no answer.

Still the woman’s hand was on her head, and restlessly moving among the sunny curls. Twice had Agnes pushed it away with a firm effort; but it returned again persistently. She had a strange, bewildered feeling, and an impulse to catch Madeline in her arms and flee away, as from impending danger.

“Ah! Peep-bo!” Madeline had stolen another look, and the woman, watchful as a serpent, had caught the glance; and now her eye held that of the child, who did not again turn her face away, but continued to gaze upon that of Mrs. Jeckyl.

“You are a little darling!” said Mrs. Jeckyl, now bending close to Madeline, and smiling upon her in her most winning manner. “The sweetest pet in all the world! Here, sit on my lap.” And she made an attempt to lift Madeline from the arm of her sister; but Agnes resisted, saying, coldly,—

“If you please, madam, let her remain where she is.”

But the woman was bent on having her own way. Not seeming even to hear the words of Agnes, she applied her strength, and drew the child upon her lap. A deep fluttering sigh came up from the heart of Madeline, and light spasms quivered over her face. There was a brief, feeble resistance; then strength and will were subdued, and, passive as a babe, she shrunk against the woman, laying her head down upon her bosom.

Roused by fear and indignation, Agnes started to her feet, and, grasping her sister by the arms, said, as she exerted her strength in the effort to remove her,—

“Let her go, Mrs. Jeckyl!”

“Don’t fret yourself, my dear,” said the woman, fixing her glittering eyes into those of Agnes, with a look meant to subdue her also. But the effort to hold her passive by the strength of a powerful will failed wholly.

“Release my sister!” she added, sternly.

But Mrs. Jeckyl drew her arm the more tightly around Madeline, and with her steady eye sought to throw a spell over Agnes.

Grown desperate with fear, Agnes now exerted all her strength, and with a single violent jerk succeeded in wresting the half-insensible form of her sister from the arms of Mrs. Jeckyl.

“You’re a polite young lady!” said Mrs. Jeckyl, in a sneering manner. “This is American good-breeding, I suppose!”

“And you’re a wicked woman,” replied Agnes, indignantly confronting the enemy.

“Snakes! Snakes!” It was the ringing, exultant voice of little “don’t-care” George, who had circled the square in a trot, and just returned to the place where he had left his sisters.

Mrs. Jeckyl turned with a start upon this unwelcome intruder.

“Old Snakes!” said the boy, stooping before the woman, with his hands upon his knees, and a grin of exultation on his face. “Old Snakes!”

Fierce as a tiger did she advance upon George; but she had an antagonist to deal with who was an over-match for her.

“Take care!” exclaimed the boy, as he darted around a lady who was passing, thus putting her between him and Mrs. Jeckyl; “take care, ma’am: that’s Old Snakes!”

The lady started, and looked half frightened.

“Take care!” repeated Young America. “She’s got a snake in her bosom! There! don’t you see its head peeping out?”

“Mercy!” exclaimed the lady, springing away from Mrs. Jeckyl, who, in trying to catch George, ran against her.

“Snakes! Snakes! Old Snakes!” screamed the little rebel, dancing with delight, and soon attracting a crowd of men, women, and children to the spot.

“Where are the snakes?” asked one and another.

“There she goes! Don’t you see her? That is Old Snakes!” answered the laughing boy, pointing to Mrs. Jeckyl, who, a second time discomfited by weapons for which she had neither shield nor armor, was acting on the principle that discretion was the better part of valor, and making a hasty retreat from the battle-field.

“You’re a very rude little boy,” said a grave old gentleman.

“And she’s a very wicked woman,” answered little Don’t Care, looking boldly up into the speaker’s face.

“Why did you call her Snakes?” inquired the man: “there’s no sense in that.”

“If you’d looked into her eyes, you’d have seen them,” replied George, half carelessly; and then, grasping the outstretched hand of his sister Agnes, he withdrew from the little crowd, and passed with quick steps homeward.

CHAPTER XVI.

DISAPPEARANCE OF MADELINE.

The danger which threatened Madeline had suddenly taken on a new and more alarming aspect. With the removal of Mrs. Jeckyl from the house of Mr. Dainty, it was believed that all direct influence had ceased, and that whatever of evil she had wrought upon the child would gradually lose its power over her as time progressed. But the enemy had not left the field; there was only a change of position.

The detail by Agnes, in an excited manner, of what had occurred in the City Square, sent through all hearts a thrill of fear. In the family council, Mr. Dainty talked indignantly of the police and arrest, while Mr. Fleetwood, for the most part silent, walked the floor with uneasy footsteps.

“I shall not dare to let Madeline pass our own threshold,” said Mrs. Dainty, in a troubled voice, “though she is dying for change of air and change of scene. Oh, isn’t it dreadful!”

“The woman must be arrested,” Mr. Dainty announced, for the tenth time,—the only remedy he had to suggest.

“What good?” inquired Uncle John.

“We will have her bound over to keep the peace,” said Mr. Dainty.

Uncle John shook his head as he answered, “You cannot bind the influence of her evil eye. It may fall upon our precious one at any moment least expected, and in spite of all law or police. The danger comes from a new direction, and is too subtle in its nature to be restrained by common bonds.”

“What then are we to do?” asked Mrs. Dainty, wringing her hands in a distressed manner.

But no one ventured a reply to her question.

After a long and troubled session, the family council broke up, without having arrived at any satisfactory result beyond the common conclusion that it would not be safe to let Madeline, in her present state, go out, and thus be in danger of meeting the strange woman who had thrown so fearful a spell over her young spirit.

Singularly enough, the child, from this time, showed a restless desire to get away from the house. Instead of creeping into lonely rooms by herself, she would seek the front windows and door, and stand gazing into the street, her eyes wandering up and down among the passengers, as if in search of some one. When taken from the door or windows, she would resist, and sometimes fall into passionate fits, that left her in a strange stupor. Three times within a week she attempted to steal away; and once she succeeded in getting off, but was met by her father, who happened to be returning home, when only a few blocks distant. To his inquiries as to where she was going, she replied, "To the Square." After a slight opposition, she concluded to go back with him, but was moody and ill-natured for the rest of the day.

So it continued for weeks, with but little change for the better. Mrs. Dainty's fears were all the while excited, and she never felt comfortable a moment when Madeline was away from her.

One day, in taking her usual after-dinner sleep, Mrs. Dainty was visited by a frightful dream about Madeline, so vivid in its character as to awaken her. Her first impulse, the moment bewildered thoughts ran clear, was to seek for her child. "Madeline!" she called, going to her chamber-door. For a moment or two she stood listening, then called, in a louder voice, "Madeline! Madeline!"

"Madeline!" It was the voice of the oldest daughter, calling from the library.

"Agnes, where is Madeline?"

"I do not know," replied Agnes, coming toward her mother. "I heard her and George up in the nursery not long ago. Perhaps she is there. George!"

A pair of rapid feet responded noisily to the call.

“George, where is your sister?”

“Don’t know,” answered the boy.

“Isn’t she in the nursery?”

“No, ma’am.”

“I heard you and her talking there not long ago,” said Agnes.

“She went down-stairs for a piece of cake a good while ago.”

Agnes almost flew down to the kitchen, and inquired of the chambermaid, whom she found there, if she had seen Madeline.

“I heard her come down-stairs a little while ago, and I think she went into the parlor,” replied the chambermaid.

One of the parlor-shutters was found pushed open, the curtain drawn aside, and a chair out of position.

“She has been here,” said Mrs. Dainty, in a choking whisper.

“Perhaps she has fallen asleep somewhere,” suggested a domestic.

“Search through the house, everywhere!” replied Mrs. Dainty. “Look into all the rooms and closets! How could you lose sight of her?”

But they searched in vain. The child was not in the house!

“Where is Uncle John?” asked Mrs. Dainty, in her terror and bewilderment.

Mr. Fleetwood entered from the street at the moment his name was mentioned, and in no way lessened the anxious fears of his niece by his troubled exclamations on learning that Madeline was nowhere to be found in the house.

“I have trembled every day in fear of this!” said the old man, pacing the floor in great agitation. “How could you leave her unguarded?”

Not long, however, did Mr. Fleetwood remain inactive. After sending word to Mr. Dainty, and despatching servants in various directions to search

through all the neighborhood, he went out himself, and commenced a series of close inquiries at all the stores and offices within several squares.

“Had she curly hair?” inquired a boy who was buying something at one of the stores visited by Mr. Fleetwood.

“Yes,” answered the old gentleman, with a sudden eagerness of manner.

“And wore a blue frock?”

“Yes.”

“Was bare-headed?”

“Yes.”

“I saw her going down the street a good while ago. An old woman, dressed in black, had her.”

“Going down the street! Where?” asked Mr. Fleetwood, with increasing excitement.

“By our house,” replied the boy.

“Where is your house?” demanded the old gentleman, in a voice that startled not only the lad, but all the other inmates of the store.

“Round in Eager Street.”

“Which way did you say they were going?”

“Toward Fifth Street.”

“I’ll give you ten dollars if you’ll find them!” said Mr. Fleetwood.

“Will you?” And the lad dropped his package on the counter and started for the door.

“Ten dollars?” He paused for reassurance.

“Yes,—ten gold dollars. Now move on their track like lightning! But stay! You are to report yourself at my house, the number of which is on this card. Let us hear from you speedily. Now, away!”

The boy disappeared from the door and went flying down the street.

Still pursuing his inquiries, Mr. Fleetwood met with others who confirmed the boy's statement that a child, resembling Madeline, had been seen in company with an old woman dressed in black. This caused him to visit the Chief of Police and secure his efficient aid in the matter, thus putting in operation the most vigilant means of discovery.

It was nearly an hour after Mr. Fleetwood left the house, when, disappointed in any good result, he returned to the anxious, frightened family, to meet pale, tearful faces and trembling inquiry. Mr. Dainty and the servants had also been in search of the lost one, but their search had proved quite as fruitless. The boy who had hoped to gain the reward of ten dollars had likewise reported himself. He had spent an hour in vain.

Night came down upon the fearfully-disturbed inmates of Mr. Dainty's family, and yet Madeline was absent. Nothing whatever could be learned in regard to her, except the single fact mentioned by the boy, and confirmed by others, that a little girl resembling her had been seen in company with an old woman dressed in black.

CHAPTER XVII. THE SEARCH.

“It is nearly a week since Mr. Fleetwood was here,” said Mrs. Elder, as she placed her workbasket on the table and drew up a chair.

Florence, who had just brought in a lighted lamp, sighed, but made no answer to the remark.

“He seemed more than disappointed, I thought, at your persistent refusal to make any advances toward a reconciliation with Mrs. Dainty,” added Mrs. Elder.

“Yes: he was offended.” There was a touch of sadness in the low voice of Florence Harper.

“No, not offended, dear,” said Mrs. Elder, quickly. “That is too strong a word. He was disturbed.”

“He asks of me too much, Aunt Mary.” Florence spoke with some warmth. “I am but human.”

“Perhaps he does. But the condition of things at Mrs. Dainty’s must be his excuse. See into what a state of mind Madeline has fallen.”

“Poor child! I cannot sleep, sometimes, for thinking of her,” said Florence.

“I can hardly wonder at Mr. Fleetwood, seeing that his heart is wrapped up in those children. He has seen how much power for good you can have over them, and, now that an evil hand is at work, seeking to mar the sweet beauty of Madeline’s spirit, can you feel surprise at his eagerness to bring her again within the sphere of your influence? I cannot, Florence.”

“Then you think I ought to go?”

Aunt Mary was silent.

“Mrs. Dainty has not desired my return.”

“She has not communicated such a desire; but Mr. Fleetwood has over and over again said that only weak pride keeps her from doing so. Shall not something be conceded for the children’s sake?”

“If you think I ought to call and see Mrs. Dainty, as Mr. Fleetwood proposes, I will go to-morrow,” said Florence.

Aunt Mary was silent.

“You will not advise me?” Florence spoke in a perplexed voice.

“If you act from my advice, you will not act freely,” said Mrs. Elder. “The question, moreover, is one of such difficult solution, that I do not see it clearly enough to speak with decision.”

The bell at this moment rung violently, causing both Florence and her aunt to start and look with inquiring eyes into each other’s faces. A few moments afterward a man’s feet were heard moving quickly along the passage.

“Mr. Fleetwood!” ejaculated Mrs. Elder, rising as the old gentleman entered hurriedly.

“Florence,” said Mr. Fleetwood, in an agitated manner, as he laid his hand upon the arm of Miss Harper, “you are wanted!”

“For what? Has any thing happened to the children?”

“Yes,—something dreadful! Madeline is lost or stolen!”

“Oh, Mr. Fleetwood! Lost! Stolen! What do you mean?”

“Madeline has been gone from the house for several hours, and we have searched for her everywhere in vain. Two or three persons in the neighborhood are positive that they saw her, or a child answering in all things her description, in company with a woman dressed in black. That infamous Mrs. Jeckyl, without doubt!”

“Dreadful! Dreadful!” exclaimed Florence, clasping her hands and turning very pale.

“Ah, Florence! Florence!” said Mr. Fleetwood, “if you had only thrown the wings of your love around her, this would not have been!”

Florence covered her face with her hands, and for some moments wept bitterly.

“I have only wished to do right,” she said, at length, with forced composure. “More has been required of me than I had strength to perform. But speak now, Mr. Fleetwood: I am ready to move at your bidding.”

“Poor Agnes is almost beside herself. A little while ago she said, in her mother’s presence, ‘Oh, if Miss Harper were only here!’ And her mother said, in reply, ‘If she had not left us, this could not have happened.’ The way is plain for you, dear child! Come with me! Come!”

The old man’s voice was pleading and tremulous. His heart was overburdened.

“This moment,” replied Florence, as she turned and glided from the room. In less than a minute she re-entered the little parlor, with bonnet and shawl, ready to accompany Mr. Fleetwood. She had no cause to complain of her reception at Mrs. Dainty’s. Agnes, the moment she entered, sprung forward to meet her, and, laying her face against her bosom, sobbed violently. Mrs. Dainty arose with a slight assumption of dignity, but gave her hand with far more warmth of manner than Mr. Fleetwood had hoped for.

“I am glad to see you, Miss Harper,” she said,— “glad for the sake of Agnes. Oh, we are in dreadful trouble! Poor Madeline! Uncle John has told you all. Oh, my child! my child! Where can she be? It will kill me!”

And Mrs. Dainty fell into a fit of hysterical sobbing.

“Have you no further intelligence of Madeline?” Mr. Fleetwood inquired of Mr. Dainty.

“None. I have just returned from the Police-Office. Not a word of the child, although reports have come in from all parts of the city.”

“Where did Mrs. Jeckyl live at the time she came here?” asked Florence. None could answer the question.

“Is there no one of whom she could be inquired about?”

“Mrs. Ashton, I think, knows something in regard to her,” said Mr. Fleetwood.

“Has any one been to see her?” inquired Florence.

“No one. We should have thought of that before,” said Mr. Dainty. “Who knows her residence?”

Mrs. Dainty gave the required information, and a servant was despatched immediately with a note to Mrs. Ashton. That lady could not say where Mrs. Jeckyl lived, but thought she was at a certain boarding-house in Twelfth Street. Thither Mr. Dainty went without delay.

“Does a Mrs. Jeckyl board here?” he inquired of the waiter who came to the door.

“No, sir,” was answered, in a tone plainly enough conveying the information that the woman about whom he made inquiry was known to the servant.

“When did she leave?” he asked.

“A month ago.”

“Where can I find her?”

“Don’t know.”

“Where did she go when she left your house?”

“Don’t know, sir.”

The waiter’s manner showed some impatience, as if the very name of the woman were an offence to him.

“I wish to see Mrs. Brainard. Is she at home?”

“Yes, sir. Walk into the parlor, and I will call her down.”

Mr. Dainty went into the parlor, and in a few moments the woman who kept the boarding-house entered.

“You had a Mrs. Jeckyl here a few weeks ago?” said Mr. Dainty.

“I had.”

“Do you know where she is now?”

“No, sir.” Mrs. Brainard’s voice had in it something of impatience and something of disgust.

“When did she leave your house?”

“Nearly four weeks ago.”

“Where did she go?”

“I really cannot answer the question, sir. I was so glad to get her out of my house that I let all interest in her die the moment she was beyond my door.”

“Do not any of your servants know where she went?”

“It is possible, sir. I will inquire of the chambermaid.”

“If you please; for I must find her, alive or dead!”

“Is there any thing wrong about her?” asked Mrs. Brainard, curiously.

“I am afraid she has stolen my child!” said Mr. Dainty, his manner growing excited.

“Stolen your child!” Mrs. Brainard became pale and agitated, and her eyes turned toward a little girl, not seven years old, who at the moment entered the room. She reached out her hand, and the child drew to her side. The moment Mrs. Brainard’s arm could be thrown around the little one, she clasped her eagerly, as if she felt that she had just escaped impending danger.

“If you can aid me in tracing her,” said Mr. Dainty, “you will confer the highest benefit.”

Mrs. Brainard left the room, and returned in a little while with the chambermaid, who thought Mrs. Jeckyl went to a house in Fifth Street near

Noble. The name of the person who kept the house she did not remember. This was all the chambermaid could tell. The waiter was questioned, but from him nothing was elicited.

“How did this woman conduct herself while in your house?” asked Mr. Dainty.

“She made herself very offensive to most of my boarders, and gained a singular influence over two of them,—ladies, who were invalids and had been suffering for years with nervous complaints. She is a woman of masculine intellect, sir. Few men are her equal in an argument. Her satire is withering.”

“So I should infer from the little I saw of her. You speak of her influence over two ladies in your family. How was this obtained?”

“In what I regard as a very disorderly way. Mrs. Jeckyl is a ‘medium,’ as it is called.”

“A mesmerist,” said Mr. Dainty.

“Or spiritualist, as some say. The thing has various names.”

“The power, if any power is possessed by these people,” said Mr. Dainty, with strong evidence of feeling, “is demoniac.”

“Just what I have said from the beginning,” replied Mrs. Brainard. “I have seen much evil, but no good, result from these disorderly practices. Had I known Mrs. Jeckyl to be a ‘medium,’ she would not have found entrance into my house. I have closed my doors against more than one of them.”

“Then Mrs. Jeckyl mesmerized the ladies to whom you refer?”

“She had table-tippings, rappings, writings, and all sorts of *diablerie* going on in their rooms for nearly a week, turning the heads of my boarders, when I closed down upon her with a strong hand, adding a notice to vacate her apartment. She demurred, and was insolent. But I have a will of my own, sir, and was not to be thwarted. If she had not left at the time specified in my notice, I would have had her trunk set out on the pavement.”

“I cannot but applaud your spirit,” said Mr. Dainty. “Desperate diseases require desperate remedies. But time passes, and I must not linger. What you say of the woman only adds to my anxiety and fear. I must find her, and rescue my child, ere sleep closes an eyelid.”

“Heaven give you success!” said Mrs. Brainard.

Taking a carriage, Mr. Dainty was driven rapidly to Fifth and Noble, where he alighted, and commenced to make inquiries from house to house; but no one had heard of a Mrs. Jeckyl. After a fruitless search of half an hour, it occurred to him that the woman might have assumed another name: so he went over the ground again, describing her person.

“There *was* such a woman here.” He received this reply at one of the houses where he called.

“Was her name Jeckyl?”

“No, sir; I think it was Hawks. But I’ll inquire, sir, if you’ll wait a minute. Won’t you walk in?”

Mr. Dainty entered the house, and was shown into one of the parlors, where, after waiting a short time, a lady joined him.

“Pardon this intrusion,” said Mr. Dainty, rising. “But I am in search of an Englishwoman who some three or four weeks ago took boarding in this neighborhood. Your servant informs me that there was a person here answering to her description.”

“What was the name of the woman of whom you are in search?” was inquired.

“Jeckyl,” replied Mr. Dainty.

The lady shook her head.

“She may have reason to pass by another name,” remarked Mr. Dainty.

“I don’t know how that may be. A tall, sinister-looking Englishwoman, with an eye that held a lurking serpent, took boarding here some weeks ago.

But she only remained three or four days. She was disagreeable to us, and we made ourselves disagreeable to her; and so we parted.”

“Where did she go?” Mr. Dainty asked, eagerly.

The lady shook her head.

“No one in this house knows. She went as she came,—a marvel and a mystery.”

“And beyond this you can give no information in regard to her?”

“None whatever.”

Mr. Dainty stood for some moments silent and perplexed. Then, with a sickening sense of disappointment, he retired, and, entering the carriage which awaited him at the door, ordered the driver to take him to his own house as rapidly as possible. He brought with him neither light nor comfort, and found none awaiting his arrival. Not a single gleam of intelligence touching the absent one had shone in upon his afflicted family.

What more could be done? The evening had waned, and it was now past the hour of nine. To abandon all search for the night seemed cruel; yet, without a single clue to unravel the mystery of the child’s absence, what step could be taken toward accomplishing her recovery? Whither were they to go in search of her?

The wretched mother, from a state of almost frantic excitement, had fallen into a condition little removed from stupor. The family physician was called in to see her, but he prescribed nothing. Her trouble was beyond the reach of any medicines he could give.

Anxious and sleepless was that night in the house of Mr. Dainty. Early in the morning the search for Madeline was renewed. Not the least active in this search was Miss Harper. With a perseverance and assiduity unknown to the sterner sex, she steadily sought to find the clue that was to unravel the mystery of Madeline’s absence. Starting where Mr. Dainty had begun, at Mrs. Brainard’s, she went from thence to the house in Fifth Street where a woman answering to the description of Mrs. Jeckyl had made a brief sojourn. Beyond this point Mr. Dainty had failed to go; but Florence was

not to be thrown off so easily. Her woman's tact and feeling all came in to quicken the interest of every member in the family, and the result was a declaration on the part of a servant, who was questioned repeatedly, that she thought she could recognise the hack-driver who took the woman, with her trunk, away.

In company with this servant, an Irish girl, Florence visited the various hack-stands in the city; but at none of them did the girl recognise any driver as the one for whom they were in search, and they were going back, the heart of Florence heavy with disappointment, when her companion exclaimed,—

“Deed, and that's the very mon himself, so it is!”

And she pointed to a hackman who was leisurely driving his carriage along, just in advance of them.

To spring forward was but a natural impulse, and in a moment the driver reined up his horses at the sign given by Florence. Leaving his box, he stepped to the pavement, saying, as he did so,—

“Want a carriage, miss?”

“I wish to ask you a question or two first,” replied Florence, slightly confused at the abruptness with which she was confronted by the man.

“As many as you please, miss,” returned the hack-driver.

“How long is it since that woman left your house?” asked Florence, turning to the girl.

“About two weeks,” was answered.

“In the morning or afternoon?”

“In the morning.”

“And this is the man who drove her away?”

“I think so. He looks like him, ony way.”

“About two weeks ago,” said Florence, now addressing the hack-driver, “a tall woman, dressed in black, was taken, with her trunk, from a house in Fifth Street near Noble. Do you remember any thing about it? Were you the driver?”

“I was,” replied the man.

The whole frame of Miss Harper quivered instantly with an eager impulse.

“Can you take me to the house where you left her?” she asked.

The man stood in thought for some moments, and then answered,—

“I think so.”

“Will you accompany me?” Florence spoke to the girl.

“Certainly, miss: I’m at your service.”

“Drive me there as quickly as possible.” And Florence stepped toward the door of the carriage, which was instantly thrown open by the hackman. Entering, with the girl, she seated herself, and was soon driven rapidly away toward the northern part of the city, and through streets with the aspect of which she was unfamiliar. At last the carriage stopped before a house of not over-inviting exterior. It was old, dingy-looking, and had a deserted aspect, all the shutters being closed to the third story.

“This is the place, miss,” said the driver, as he opened the carriage-door.

“Are you certain?” inquired Florence, a slight tremor running along her nerves as she looked up at the house.

“Dead sure,” replied the hackman, in a confident voice. “I know the house by its shut-up look. I’ve passed here many a time, and have never seen a window open yet, or the sign of a human about the house.”

“Come,” said Florence to the Irish girl, and the two stepped from the carriage, and, crossing the pavement, ascended the steps. The bell was rung, and, after waiting for a few moments, the door opened, and a slightly-

formed girl, about fifteen years of age, with a singularly interesting face, inquired their errand.

“Does a Mrs. Jeckyl live here?” asked Florence.

“No, ma’am,” replied the girl.

“Mrs. Hawks?” said the companion of Florence.

The girl shook her head.

“We were told,” said Florence, “that a woman bearing one of these names came to your house about two weeks ago. She was a tall Englishwoman, dressed in black.”

“Won’t you come in and see my mother?” And the girl moved back a pace or two from the door.

According to the invitation, Florence stepped over the threshold and entered the house, following the girl, who conducted her into the back-parlor, which was feebly lighted by the rays that came in through a small opening in the shutters.

“Sit down,” said the girl, “and I will call my mother.” And she passed, with a gliding motion, noiselessly from the apartment.

The eyes of Florence soon accommodated themselves to the feeble light, and, gazing around the room, she noted its contents with curious interest. The furniture was meagre and plain, the carpets worn, and the window-curtains faded. A few articles, which seemed the relics of a better condition, indicated the possession of taste. While yet engaged in making these observations, Florence, whose eyes had been peering into the adjoining parlor, the shutters of which were closed tightly, turned her head and met the steady, penetrating gaze of a woman who had entered so silently that no sound of footfall had disturbed the air.

This woman was in height a little above the medium stature; of slender proportions; with an unusually high and broad forehead; faded, almost sallow, complexion; eyes black as coals, yet bright as fire; lips arching, thin, and flexible; and a delicate, receding chin. Florence arose, and stood before

the woman in momentary confusion, her eyes drooping beneath her singularly penetrating gaze.

“Pardon this intrusion,” said Florence, with considerable hesitation of manner. “I am in search of a person who, as I am informed, came to your house some time within the past two weeks.”

The woman requested Florence to resume her seat, and then, drawing a chair in front of her, said, in a low, musical, yet not altogether pleasant voice,—

“What is the name of the person you are seeking?”

“Mrs. Jeckyl,” replied Florence.

The woman shook her head.

“She has gone by the name of Hawks, I believe,” said Florence.

Another shake of the head, accompanied by the remark,—

“I do not know any one bearing either name.”

“She is an Englishwoman, tall of stature.”

“Ah!” The response was in a quick voice, in which was a shade of surprise.

“She dressed in black,” said Florence.

“Did you say her name was Jeckyl?” asked the woman.

“Yes. But I believe she has also gone by the name of Hawks.”

“Was she young, or old?”

“Past the middle point of life.”

“A woman answering your description was here about two weeks ago, and remained several days. But her name was Fordham.”

“Another *alias*, no doubt,” said Florence, in a quickened voice. “And now, madam, if you will tell me where I can find her, you will confer an

obligation beyond all price.”

“Is she a relation?” inquired the woman, looking steadily into the excited face of her young visitor.

“No!” answered Florence, with an expression of disgust.

“Why do you seek her?” The manner and tone of the woman threw a chill over the feelings of Miss Harper.

“The person I seek has, it is feared, enticed away, or stolen, a little girl, whose mother is almost beside herself in consequence.”

“A grave charge to bring against any one,” said the woman, seriously. “I hardly think it can apply to Mrs. Fordham.”

“You know something of her antecedents, then?” Florence spoke inquiringly.

“Nothing,” answered the woman, almost coldly.

“Where can I find her now?”

“I have neither seen nor heard of her since she left my house,” said the woman.

The look of distress that settled on the countenance of Miss Harper seemed to awaken a motion of sympathy in the woman’s heart.

“Whose child is missing?” she inquired, in a soft voice.

“The child of Mrs. Edward Dainty, number 400 —— Street; a little girl, eleven years old. She has been absent since yesterday. The woman suspected of the crime of enticing her away was employed, a short time ago, as governess, but dismissed almost immediately, in consequence of certain defects that entirely destroyed her right influence over the children.”

“What were those defects?” inquired the woman, evincing a new interest in the matter.

“She attempted, it was thought, to magnetize the children.”

“Ah!” The woman seemed more interested, and leaned toward Florence, fixing upon her, as she did so, her dark, bright, weird-looking eyes. There was a brief pause.

“Well, what of it?” inquired the woman, seeing that Florence remained silent.

“The consequences were serious, so far as the little girl I refer to was concerned,” said Florence. “She was changed almost from the hour Mrs. Jeckyl drew her within the sphere of her influence.”

“Delicately organized, and easily impressed, no doubt.” The woman spoke half to herself.

“She is a sweet, lovely child,” said Florence, “and it is terrible to think of her pure, almost infantine spirit coming within the sphere of such a woman. Death, in my regard, would be a blessing instead.”

“You speak warmly on the subject,” said the woman.

“I have cause to do so, for I feel warmly,” said Florence.

“You have met Mrs. Jeckyl, as you call her?”

“No. Happily, I never crossed her path. My foot has not touched the slime of her serpent trail!”

The woman’s face darkened, as if a shadow had fallen upon it.

“If the person you call Jeckyl, and the one who passed a few days in my house, are the same,” she said, “your language is far too strong. Though she is to me, partially, a stranger, yet I have had testimony in regard to her of the highest and most authoritative character. I know her quality as well as if I had seen her heart laid open and read it like the pages of a book. She belongs to an exceptional class in the present time. To ordinary people she is unintelligible. The high purposes of her life are not appreciated by them. She cannot be weighed in their balance.”

The woman spoke rapidly, and with enthusiasm, quick changes running over her face, and her eyes brightening and darkening by turns like a stormy sky. A low shudder of fear crept into the heart of Florence as she looked at

this woman; and the Irish girl who accompanied her, and who had until now remained standing, moved backward toward the door of the room, gaining which, as a point of advantage, she said,—

“Deed, and, miss, I think as how we’d as well be going from here.”

“Stay a moment.” And Florence reached forth a hand toward the girl.

“I shouldn’t wonder if I was riding on a broomstick next!” muttered the latter, as she receded into the passage.

“Don’t go, if you please. I will be with you directly.” There was a tremor of anxiety in the tones of Florence.

“I will not call in question a word you have said,” remarked Florence, speaking in a deprecatory tone, as she turned to the woman. “All I ask now is that you give me some clue by which I can trace this person from the time she left your house. That is my errand here; and I beg, in the name of humanity, that you will satisfy it to the extent of your ability.”

“I asked her no questions when she left,” replied the woman. “She came with a message from an absent one in the upper spheres,—a message that filled my heart with reverent gladness. As an honored guest, she remained for a few days an inmate of my house, and then went as she came. The spirits led her here, and the spirits withdrew her in their own good time. She is gifted in a high degree; and they have chosen her as one of their most favored messengers to darkly-wandering mortals. I bless the day she came to this house. Ah! now I see the white garments, and now the angel-face, of that blessed daughter who ten years ago left my heart desolate.”

The woman’s eyes were elevated, and she seemed in an ecstatic vision.

“She removed the veil from my dull eyes,—that honored messenger!” she continued, “and, by a pure vision, I now see beyond the dark boundary which conceals the beautiful world where the blessed ones dwell. She likewise unstopped my ears, so that they can hear spirit-voices. I hearken to them all day long.”

“I call nothing of this in question,” said Florence, rising, and moving toward the door; “but other matters of interest press on me too imperatively

for delay. Once again, let me implore you to give me some light. Think again! Is there no one likely to be informed of her present home, to whom you could refer me? Let your mother's heart counsel for me in this matter!"

"I trust the spirits in all things. For wise ends they have hidden from me all that pertains to their favored messenger. She came in mystery, and departed as she came. In the spirit I meet her almost daily. In the body I know her not."

The Irish girl had already retreated beyond the outer door, and stood upon the marble steps. Hopeless of gaining any information here touching the object of her search, Florence, over whose spirit had fallen a strange, suffocating fear, as if her very life were waning, turned from the woman, and almost rushed, panic-stricken, from the house.

"Dade, and it's the divil's den!" ejaculated the Irish girl, bluntly, as they crowded into the carriage. "I wouldn't go into that house again for a mint o' money. I expected every instant to see you spirited off!"

Florence did not answer the girl, but ordered the driver to leave her at the house in Fifth Street and then to take her to the residence of Mr. Dainty. She brought neither light, hope, nor comfort to those who had anxiously awaited her return, and found none for her own troubled heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NEST OF PSEUDO-SPIRITUALISTS.

As Florence Harper left the room in which the singular and exciting interview described in the last chapter took place, and fled in strange alarm from the house, the girl who had admitted her came gliding in with her noiseless step from the adjoining apartment, and, standing before the woman, who yet remained in a partially ecstatic condition, said,—

“Oh, mother! This is dreadful!—dreadful!”

“What are you saying, child? What is dreadful? I see beautiful visions, and hear music of angelic sweetness. I see nothing dreadful. Give me your hands, Adele dear.”

And she reached forth her small hands, so white and thin as to be semi-transparent. But the girl stepped back a single pace, eluding the offered grasp.

“Why don’t you give me your hands, child?” The woman spoke with some impatience.

“Because I would rather keep them in my own possession just now,” replied Adele, in a low, clear tone, the slight quiver in which showed a disturbed state of feeling.

“You are perverse,” said the woman. “The spirits must be consulted. There are evil influences at work.”

“They are at work in that Mrs. Fordham, if, as this young lady says, she has stolen a child!” Adele made answer, speaking firmly. “I never liked her. She’s wicked!”

“Adele!”

“I believe it, mother.” The girl was resolute. “She tried to get me in her power; but I was able to resist her, thank God!”

“Daughter! daughter! What is the meaning of this?” exclaimed the woman, in surprise and displeasure, rising as she spoke, and advancing toward Adele, with the evident belief that if she could get her hands upon her she could more effectually bring the full power of her strong will to bear in subduing her rebellious spirit. But Adele retreated into the next room, saying, in a quick, decided voice,—

“I’m getting heart-sick of all this, mother! There is in it more of evil than good, I sadly fear. I don’t like the people who come here. Some of them may mean all right; but some of them, I know, mean all wrong; and your Mrs. Fordham is one of them. And so is Mr. Dyer. I hate the very sight of him! He said something to me last night.”

“What did he say?” eagerly asked the mother.

“I can’t tell you now, because I promised him that I would not. But if he says it again I’ll dash the first thing into his face that I can lay my hands on.”

Just then the door-bell rang, and Adele answered the summons. The very man about whom they were speaking entered. The moment Adele saw him she started back, and, running along the passage, escaped from his presence up-stairs.

“Mr. Dyer!” said the mother, with a pleased familiarity of manner, singular under the circumstances, to say the least of it. She gave him her hand, which he grasped hard, and retained while they walked back into the darkened parlors.

“Mrs. Weir!” was his simple response. His tone was low, penetrating, agreeable. Let us describe Mr. Dyer. It is the countenance that indicates the man. Chin, mouth, nostrils, eyes, forehead,—on these each one writes his character, though he tries never so hard to play the hypocrite. The lineaments of the face never lie. But in the present instance the face was so much hidden by a hairy veil that much of its true expression was concealed. Intellectually, taking his rather low forehead as a guide, Mr. Dyer was not a man of superior endowments. But his small brown eyes, shining out from their hollow recesses, indicated mental activity and alertness. The skin of his face was colorless, and had a bleached appearance, all the lines running

down, as if it had been rained upon every day for a dozen years. High up, reaching nearly to the cheek-bones, the hairy investure began, and that seemed to have yielded also to the causes which made all the facial lines perpendicular. It was guiltless of curl, or curving line of beauty, but shot down, straight and thick, a dark brown mass, wiry and unsightly. The hair upon his head was long, dry, harsh, and straight, lying like the mane of some beast upon his shoulders. His full, pouting lips indicated sensuality. Yet even this countenance had been schooled by a sinister purpose so as to deceive some by its meek expression of goodness.

Mr. Dyer was that intellectual, strong-willed woman's plaything, a biologist,—we use one of the names assumed by a modern sect of pseudo-spiritualists,—a getter-up of circles, and a leader in the insane orgies of mesmerism run mad. He was wonderfully given to trance-ecstasies, and could elevate himself into the highest of the spiritual spheres in a moment and at will. Familiar *tête-à-têtes* with Adam, Noah, Moses, Socrates, Washington, and the world's hosts of worthies and heroes, were had by him daily; and most of them honored him as the medium of important communications to the world. From some cause, however, by the time these communications reached the sphere of nature, they had lost all meaning and coherence. Still, Mr. Dyer enunciated them with oracular gravity, and many who listened imagined a deep symbolical meaning.

Not possessing that strong, masculine, reasoning mind which gives man power over man by virtue of superior intellectual force, and yet having a large share of that bad ambition of which Milton's Satan was a type, Mr. Dyer sought influence over others—females particularly—by means of modern witchcraft, going from house to house “and leading silly women captive,” and, by his devilish arts, withering or destroying the budding germs of rational freedom in little children, whenever they chanced to come within the sphere of his blasting influence. He was one of a bad class of sensualists, whose active propensities gain power by cunning and hypocrisy. It was a day of evil triumph with him when he discovered that he was a “powerful medium,” and could subdue by means of his stronger will the consciousness of sickly, nervous women, and so control the wonderful organism of their spirits as to make them speak and act like mere automatons. It was a vast improvement on Maelzel and Kempelon!

At the time of his introduction to the reader, Dyer had already been the instrument of promoting four separations between husband and wife. He was himself a married man; but, having discovered that another, a handsomer, brighter, and more attractive woman than his lawful partner, was conjoined to him as to the spirit, and therefore, according to his reading of the matter, his real wife, he had separated himself from the heart-broken woman against whom he had committed one of the most grievous sins in the crowded calendar of human wrongs. In the eye of the law he was a vagrant, for he had no apparent means of support. But he managed to get his share of worldly gear from his duped or corrupt admirers. It was sufficient for some of them that the familiar spirits, or demons, required their favorite instrument to be clothed and fed and supplied with needful money.

Such was the man whose appearance gave evident pleasure to Mrs. Weir, notwithstanding the intimation of her daughter, just made, that his evil eyes had fallen upon her, and that already his polluting breath had touched her fair young cheek.

As the two entered the parlors, Dyer still holding the woman's hand, he gazed into her eyes with a fixed look, beneath which her own did not quail.

“And what have the spirits been saying to you this morning?” He spoke in a low voice, modulated to musical cadences, and bent his face close to hers. “I can see, by the lucid depth and strange ethereal brightness of your eyes, that you have been holding sweet communion with them.”

They sat down upon a sofa, and Mrs. Weir replied,—

“New spheres are opening to me. I am anxious to rise higher, higher, into more celestial states; but the spirits are ever teaching me lessons of patience. I am too worldly yet, they say. The dross of this outer sphere is dimming my fine gold; the stain of earth is on my garments. Their low whispers are lingering yet in my ears, and my soul feels the hush of a deep tranquillity.”

“Beautiful! Celestial!” And Mr. Dyer raised his hands in almost saintly benediction.

“Of all this the scoffing world knows nothing,” went on Mrs. Weir, murmuring in a soft, sweet voice. “It is too gross and sensual, and, like the swine, tramples on these precious pearls.”

“And still, like the swine,” added Dyer, “turns upon and rends us who cast them at its feet.”

“Alas! too true!” Mrs. Weir spoke almost sadly.

“But the spirits sustain us. Their communications are our exceeding great reward,” said Dyer, with enthusiasm. “We are not in the world nor of it, but enjoy the glorious privileges of the immortals.”

He leaned closer.

“To the pure all things are pure——”

The door-bell rung, and each gave a start,—a shade of disappointment clouding the brightness of their faces.

“Did you expect another visitor at this time?” asked Dyer.

“No,” replied Mrs. Weir, as she listened to the light steps of Adele on the stairs and moving along the passage to the door.

Both sat very still, hearkening. A low ejaculation of surprise escaped the lips of Adele. Then were heard the rustling of a woman’s garments, and the movement of feet.

Mr. Dyer and Mrs. Weir arose as the parlor-door was pushed open.

“Mrs. Fordham!” exclaimed the latter, as a tall woman in black entered with a slow, stately step, holding by the hand a shrinking little girl, who drew back in partial fear at the sight of strangers. Close behind them was Adele, her usually quiet face now alive with feeling, and her glance fixed with eager interest on the beautiful child. She reached out her hand and said,—

“Come, dear!”

But the woman reproved her with a look, and drew the little one closer.

“Mrs. Fordham! Welcome again!” said Dyer, giving the visitor his hand. “You drop down upon us as if from cloud-land. I thought you were far away. But who have we here?”

And he stooped a little, carefully examining the child’s face.

“A prize,—a treasure,—a good gift from our generous spirits,” answered Mrs. Fordham, as she sat down with the air of one who felt herself at home, and lifted the child upon her lap. Drawing her head down upon her bosom, she made a pass or two with her hand, and the little girl was still as an effigy.

“There never was a more impressible subject,” said the woman, “nor one through whom spirits communicate more freely. I saw it in her the instant my eyes rested on her face. Then I consulted the spirits, and they said that she was born to a high mission. But how was she to be brought into the sphere of her holy calling? In common language, she was not mine. I was not the instrument of her birth, and therefore, in the world’s regard, had no right to dispose of her. Again I consulted the spirits. The answer was clear. The bars of custom must be thrown down, they said. The child was destined to a high use, and human bonds must not restrain her. For a time the spirit was willing but the flesh weak. I hesitated, held back, doubted; but clearer and clearer came the indications. At last all communication was withdrawn from me. I asked, but received no answer; again and again I called to my old and dear companions, but not even a faint, far-off echo was returned to my half-despairing cry. Then, and not till then, I yielded. I sent forth my thought and affection toward this child—this beloved one of the spirits—and drew her toward me. Though distant as to the body, I felt that my hands were upon her, and that she was approaching. And she came in good time,—came and threw herself into my arms,—a young devotee to this new science, a neophyte priestess for service at the altar in that grand spiritual temple, the walls of which are towering upward to heaven.”

Mrs. Fordham’s eyes gradually assumed an upward angle: a rapt expression came into her face; her voice was deep and muffled by feeling.

“Precious darling! Chosen one! Beloved of the angels!” said Mrs. Weir, bending over the little girl, who now lay in a trance-sleep against the woman’s bosom.

“Will the spirits communicate through her now?” asked Dyer.

“Let me inquire of them,” answered the woman. And she relapsed into a state of real or apparent cessation of all exterior consciousness. Ten minutes of almost pulseless silence followed, the child still lying in her strange, unnatural sleep.

“They will speak,” said Mrs. Fordham, in a deep yet hushed tone. Then she laid her hand gently on the colorless face of the child-medium, and held it there for the space of several seconds. A few light passes followed. The child caught her breath: there were slight convulsive spasms of the chest and limbs, while a most painful expression saddened her gentle face.

“Dear child!” murmured Mrs. Weir.

“It is the strife in her soul of evil spirits against the good,” said Mrs. Fordham. “She is not yet wholly purified for her great mission. Happily for her, the battle is fought in states of unconsciousness. She is spared all suffering.”

“The spirits love and protect her,” said Dyer.

“They love and protect their own; and she is theirs,” answered Mrs. Fordham.

As she spoke, she raised the child to a sitting posture. Her eyes were still closed, and the look of sadness and suffering yet remained. Dyer drew a chair and sat down directly in front of her. Mrs. Weir took another and did the same, but arose immediately, and, looking to the opposite side of the room, said,—

“Come, Adele; bring a chair and sit down with us.”

But Adele neither answered nor stirred.

“Daughter, did you hear me?” Mrs. Weir’s voice was firmer.

“I do not wish to come into the circle,” replied Adele.

“Don’t be foolish, child: come,” said Mrs. Weir.

“No, mother: I wish to be excused.”

Mrs. Weir was moving across the room toward her daughter, when Dyer said,—

“Stop, madam! Let us consult the spirits.”

Mrs. Weir came back.

“Mrs. Fordham, ask the spirits about this strange perverseness,” said Dyer.

The woman closed her eyes and sat quite still for a minute.

“The spirits require the circle to be harmonized,” was Mrs. Fordham’s decision.

“You must come, Adele!” Dyer spoke half authoritatively.

But Adele stood as firm as marble.

“Adele!” Mrs. Weir’s voice, now sharp and commanding, thrilled through the rooms.

“There are other spirits besides Mrs. Fordham’s familiars, and they tell me not to harmonize her circle to-day,” answered Adele, speaking very calmly, and with meaning emphasis.

“They are evil, lying spirits!” exclaimed Dyer, with excitement.

“From the infernal spheres,” said Mrs. Fordham, solemnly. “I am afraid, Mrs. Weir, that sirens are seeking to possess your daughter, that they may utterly destroy her.”

“Adele, come! Flee to us quickly!” cried Mrs. Weir, in a tremor of excitement, stretching forth her hands.

“My spirits are true, and I believe them!” answered the girl, resolutely. And she stood immovable.

“The spirits will not communicate unless the circle is harmonized,” said Mrs. Fordham, with ill-concealed impatience.

“Let the perverse creature withdraw, then.” Mr. Dyer spoke sharply.

“Go!” said Mrs. Fordham, waving her hand.

But Adele stirred not.

“Go!” repeated her mother.

There was not a sign of obedience.

“All things must harmonize, or the spirits will not answer. If the girl will not come into the circle, she must leave the room.” It was Mrs. Fordham who spoke.

“The spirits tell me to remain, and I will obey them!” said Adele, with unwavering firmness.

“They are bad spirits!” Dyer almost thundered out the words, his pent-up anger and impatience getting the better of his self-control.

“Lying spirits!” shrieked Mrs. Fordham, catching the excitement of the man.

“Who is to decide?” asked Adele, calmly.

“Heaven’s messenger!” said Mrs. Weir, pointing to Mrs. Fordham. “It is through her that the spirits of the higher spheres descend.”

“Heaven’s messengers don’t rob mothers of their children!” Adele answered. “If there are lying spirits in the case, they have found access to her ears, not mine!”

“Heavens and earth!” exclaimed Dyer, starting to his feet; “what does the girl mean?”

Mrs. Fordham’s self-imposed calmness all departed, and the fire in her eyes shot out toward Adele like serpent-tongues. With three or four quick passes, she restored the little girl who sat in her lap to a half-dreamy consciousness of real things, and then, taking two or three strides toward the door, said, glancing over her shoulder,—

“The same room, Mrs. Weir?”

“The same,” was answered, and woman and child disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BIRD AND THE SERPENT.

“You needn’t stand glowering upon me after that fashion, John Dyer!” said Adele, after Mrs. Fordham and the child had left the room. “I know you, sir!”

“Silence!” was the passionate response, and——

“Silence!” was repeated, though in feebler utterance, from the mother of Adele.

“That is a wicked woman!” said the girl, resolutely. “There is a serpent in her eyes. I saw it when she was last here; and it looks out with keener venom now. Mother, beware of her!—and——” she hesitated a moment, and then went on, in a bolder tone,—“beware of *him*! There is an adder in your path: one step more, and it will sting you to death!”

She pointed her finger steadily at Dyer, and stood gazing at him until his eyes fell in confusion. Then she passed from the room with rapid but noiseless feet, gliding away like a spirit.

“An enemy hath done this,” said Dyer, almost meekly, turning to the mother of Adele. “You have slumbered, I fear, and let the evil one scatter tares in your field.”

“I know not its meaning,” sighed Mrs. Weir. “This morning I noted the first signs of a perverse temper.”

“What were the signs?” Dyer looked sharply into her face, reading every changing lineament, as if he were scanning the pages of a book. There was slight confusion, and a moment’s hesitation, on the part of Mrs. Weir. She then answered,—

“I desired to take her hand and lead her up among the beatific mountains, but she held back. I urged, and she refused. She then acknowledged having resisted Mrs. Fordham in the same way when that honored messenger made

my house bright with her presence. Oh, it is distressing me beyond utterance!”

“Can you trace the cause?” inquired the man.

“No.”

“Your sphere is not strong enough.”

“Who has a stronger sphere than Mrs. Fordham?” queried the mother. “She has set her at defiance also: nay, her power of resistance just now proved more than our combined influence was able to overcome.”

“I can do it!” said Dyer, after a pause. “Leave her in my hands. I will exorcise the spirits of evil.”

“Your sphere repels her.”

Dyer was on the alert again, and his keen glances were upon the face of his companion.

“Has she said so?”

“Yes. And you heard her strange language just now.”

“Well? What further?”

“I have nothing further. We know that antagonistic spheres exist.”

“True, true.” The man seemed relieved. “She has compared me to a serpent. But I know my own heart. Evil, be thou far from me! Come, angelic purity! As we draw nearer the invisible world we grow more ethereal, and the coarseness of depraved nature is dissipated in the fire of divine affinities. To the pure all things——”

The ringing of the door-bell again interrupted their pleasant communion, and in a few moments they were joined by two visitors,—females,—who met Dyer and Mrs. Weir in a manner that showed them to be on terms of close familiarity.

In the mean time the woman Fordham had retired with the child to one of the chambers above, her mind deeply disturbed by the unexpected incident

of Adele's opposition to the necromantic rites about being instituted,—so much disturbed that she was unable to prolong the spell she wished to throw over the consciousness of the little girl, who momentarily became more and more distressingly alive to the strangeness of her position.

“Oh, ma'am,” she said, in pleading tones, as the woman shut the door on entering the chamber, “won't you take me home? Mother is crying for me. I heard her crying all last night. Oh, dear! I do want to go home to my mother!”

“Don't fret yourself, child!” replied the woman, a little harshly. “You shall go home.”

“Take me home now, won't you? I don't like to be here. You promised me yesterday that I should go home before night. Oh, ma'am, do take me home now!”

The little clasped hands were raised pleadingly; the husky voice quivered; the pale face had in it a look of fear and distress that would have melted any heart not made hard, by selfish passions, as the nether millstone.

“You shall go home, dear,” said the woman, softening her voice and assuming an affectionate manner. “You shall see your mother to-night.”

And she tried to lift her upon her lap, but the child resisted and held back. Then the woman seized her by both arms, and held her firmly, looking into her eyes, and exerting the serpent's power of fascination.

The child stood still, held by a grip too strong for resistance, but she let her eyes fall.

“Look at me!” commanded the woman. But the glance she hoped to catch and hold in her weird gaze did not turn itself from the floor.

“Look at me! Do you hear?” And the woman placed one hand under the little girl's chin and forced her face upward. But, instead of looking at the woman, the child shut her eyes.

Holding her thus, Mrs. Fordham commenced with one hand a series of mesmeric passes; but the child struggled and tried to escape from her. A blow was evidently meditated, for there was a quick raising of one hand,

accompanied by an angry flash sweeping over the woman's face. But the cruel purpose was repressed.

“What has come over the girl?” she muttered, impatiently. “Am I thus to be baffled again? I did not look for it here! But down, excitement! If I would regain my power, it must be through calmness and a resolute will.”

Releasing the child, who instantly shrunk away to the farther side of the room, Mrs. Fordham assumed an unimpassioned manner, but kept her gaze steadily resting upon her victim.

The woman sat on the bedside, and the child stood pale, trembling, and in tears, crouching against the wall directly opposite. Every thing became silent and motionless as death. The child did not look up, but steadily persisted in avoiding the gaze of her persecutor. But the powers of evil were too strong: there was an eye upon her that possessed a charm too potent for her to withstand; she was a frightened bird struggling, but in vain, against the fascination of a serpent. One, two, three minutes passed; all remained hushed as if statues and not living forms were in the room. At last the woman stirred slightly, as though the inner excitement had struggled through all restraining bars and shuddered along the surface: her head gradually bent forward, and her eyes protruded fearfully. And now there was an apparent relaxation of muscle in the child. Evidently, her will was losing its faculty of resistance. A minute more, and the woman began approaching, with the stealthy movements of a cat, her eyes still fixed intently upon the girl. Cautiously, and as if in doubt, she laid her hand against her cheek, touching it lightly. The child did not stir! She pressed the hand harder: there was no sign of consciousness! She called: there was no answer!

Suddenly a new life seemed thrilling along the woman's veins. Her countenance flushed; her eyes danced in light; her whole person quivered. Stooping over the child, she lifted her with some caution, as if fearing the spell might dissolve, bore her across the room, and laid her upon the bed. Then she made slow passes above her for the space of nearly five minutes.

“All right!” she muttered, as a glow of evil triumph warmed her disfigured face, and her thin lips parted in a demoniac smile. “It was a hard struggle, but a vain one! There is an opposition of spheres in this house, and

the medium of its activity is Adele Weir. Twice has she set me at defiance, twice thwarted the spirits. It must not occur again. Am I to be set at naught by a stripling of a girl like this?"

After standing over the unconscious child for some time longer, and using sundry tests to make sure that she was completely locked in magic slumber, Mrs. Fordham turned away, and, passing through the door, closed it, and was going down stairs, when a slight noise caught her ear. Glancing up in the direction from which it came, she caught sight of Adele watching her from the passage above. It was only a momentary glimpse; for, on finding that she was observed, Adele retired from sight instantly.

Mrs. Fordham paused, stood thinking for a little while, and then slowly returned to the room. She entered and examined the lock on the inside. It held a key. This was removed and passed into the wards on the other side.

"Thus I make surety doubly sure," she said to herself, again closing the door, which she locked, placing the key in her pocket. She then went down to the parlor.

"How is our little trance-medium?" asked Dyer, as she entered.

"All right," was answered. "Spirits from the lower spheres have battled hard for her, but the strife was vain. She is safe."

"I congratulate you on the triumph," said Mrs. Weir, enthusiastically. "She is a lovely child," was added, with a touch of mother-feeling in her voice.

"The most remarkable child-medium I have yet seen." Mrs. Fordham looked at the two visitors before mentioned. "The communications received through her are extraordinary. I am taking record of them daily, and their publication will astonish the world. Society is on the eve of some new developments. It is the night before the morning."

"Is she tranquil?" asked Mrs. Weir.

"Entirely so."

"Sleeping?"

“All the avenues to her soul are locked, and I have the key,” said Mrs. Fordham, with triumph in her tones. “Hark!” She paused and listened, her eyes raised to the ceiling. After a few moments of silence, she went on. “I thought there was a movement in the room above. But it was imagination, I presume.”

“Is there no danger of her awakening?” asked one of the visitors.

“None: only the hand that shut the door of her soul’s consciousness can open it again.”

“How wonderful is this power!” said the last speaker. “I tremble sometimes to think what terrible consequences might follow its abuse.”

“There is no danger of its abuse,” returned Mrs. Fordham.

“You think not?”

“I am sure of it.”

“None but the favored of spirits are intrusted with this power,” said Dyer; “and they are protected.”

“Will not the spirits speak through her to-day?” asked one of the visitors.

“I do not know. There have been opposing influences; but I trust they are removed. In half an hour we will go up to where she is lying in trance-sleep; and perhaps the spirits will move her to utterance.”

“Is she a speaking or writing medium?” was asked.

“Speaking. Whenever her lips are unclosed, it seems as if you heard a spirit talking.”

Half an hour was permitted to elapse, and then Mrs. Fordham, Dyer, Mrs. Weir, and the two visitors passed with hushed footsteps up to the chamber. At the door Mrs. Fordham paused, and, speaking to Mrs. Weir, said,—

“Your daughter must not be permitted to enter. The circle cannot be harmonized if she is present.”

“I will see to it,” was whispered back.

The door was then unlocked, and the company entered, each one with suspended breath. Mrs. Fordham preceded; but, ere she had gone half across the room, an exclamation of surprise and disappointment fell from her lips. The child was not there! In less than half a minute every part of the chamber was searched; but no sign of the missing one appeared.

“She may have thrown herself from the window!” said Mrs. Weir, blank terror in her countenance at the thought.

The window was opened, but no form lay on the ground beneath.

“Where is your daughter?” demanded Mrs. Fordham.

Mrs. Weir stepped to the door, and called, “Adele!” Twice, thrice she called; but only echo replied.

“It is her work!” exclaimed Mrs. Fordham, roused to mad excitement.

“Impossible!” said Mrs. Weir. “Adele! Adele!” Her voice went thrilling through the house.

“Search everywhere, from garret to cellar!” Mrs. Fordham spoke in a commanding voice, and then went striding up-stairs and sweeping like a storm from room to room. Chambers, attics, lumber-rooms, closets, cellar, and out-buildings, they searched with scrupulous care; but neither Adele nor the child were found. Both had vanished from the house, leaving no sign.

CHAPTER XX. THE RESCUE.

“This is going too far,” said Adele, as she came forward again and stood in sight of the room where the child lay in its fearfully-unnatural sleep, after Mrs. Fordham had gone down to the parlors to join Mrs. Weir and her companions. Slowly, listening almost breathlessly, and with silent footsteps, she descended the stairs, and, approaching the chamber, laid her hand upon the door-knob and turned and pressed against it. To her disappointment, she found that Mrs. Fordham had locked her prisoner in and withdrawn the key.

For a little while Adele stood by the door, her face shadowed with perplexity. She then moved silently away, and, going into her own room, sat down, with a sober face, to think. The right thought was soon suggested. Starting up with a sudden impulse, she went to the door of her own apartment and quickly withdrew the key. It fitted the lock, as she had hoped, and in less than ten seconds she was in the room where the child lay in its deathlike slumber. Carefully shutting the door, she crossed to the bed. The child had not stirred since Mrs. Fordham left the chamber. Stooping down, Adele gazed upon the pure young face, until tears blinded her eyes. Then, laying a hand upon her, she shook her gently. But not a sign of life, beyond the feeble respiration, appeared.

An expression half surprise, half fear, came into the young girl’s countenance; and she stood quite still for an instant. Then, laying her hand again upon the child, she shook her violently, putting at the same time her mouth to her ear, and saying, in a low but eager voice, “Wake! wake up! Come!”

But she might as well have spoken to the dead. The sleeper’s senses were locked by a key that was not in her possession; and so she could neither find the wards nor spring the bolt.

For a little while Adele remained bewildered and irresolute. Then she made a more violent effort to break the spell that shut the doors of

conscious life. It was in vain.

“Time flies. It must be done now, or the opportunity may pass forever. Poor child! Poor lamb in the wolf’s grasp! I must, I will, save you!”

Turning from the bed, as she thus spoke with herself, Adele left the room, and, going to her own chamber, hurriedly put on a bonnet and shawl, and then, coming back, lifted the sleeper resolutely in her arms, and, bearing her from the apartment, locked the door and withdrew the key. For a few moments she stood at the top of the stairs, irresolute as to her next step. Then, laying her burden upon the floor, she went down the first flight and listened. The sound of muffled voices from the parlor was distinct enough to warn her that one of the doors at least was open, and that it would be folly to attempt to leave the house by the front way. There was an outlet back, by means of a narrow alley leading past a row of small houses into a court, and thence to a street running parallel with the one on which Mrs. Weir lived. But, to reach the yard so as to gain this outlet, Adele must descend the stairway, the foot of which was near the back-parlor, and pass out by a door opening within a few feet of the parlor-window. This mode of egress was, therefore, almost as impossible as the first, for the window she knew was open.

For a little while the excited girl was in despair; and the words, “It is hopeless,” were on her lips, when she thought of a low shed out upon which she could climb from one of the second-story windows of the back-building. To think was to act. Hurriedly lifting the child, she passed into the small room over the kitchen, closing the door behind her, so as not to be seen by any one who might happen to come up the stairway. The window was raised: a glance at the shed below showed the distance to be not less than three feet from the window-sill. There was a low table in the room: on this she laid her burden carefully, and then drew it to the window. A quick but searching examination of all the windows overlooking the position she occupied told her that she was free from observation. Next she dropped down lightly upon the shed, and from thence sprung like an antelope to the yard, full six feet below, her form disappearing beyond the edge of the slanting shed. Fortunately, there was an old table in the yard, which Adele drew up to the side of the outbuilding, and, mounting thereon, without an instant of hesitation, clambered to the roof, and gained the window, just

inside of which the child still lay as motionless as if she were dead. It was only the work of an instant to draw her forth and carry her to the eaves of the shed, where Adele laid her carefully and then leaped down upon the table below. Then she took her in her arms and lifted her from the shed, and then jumped to the pavement, bearing the heavy burden still in her arms. Almost like a spirit she vanished through the gate, shutting it noiselessly behind her. Hurrying down the long alley-way and through the court, Adele emerged upon the open street. An omnibus was passing at the moment, and she signed the driver to stop. It so happened that no passengers had yet entered the vehicle, and this made her and her insensible companion the sole occupants when it moved on again. Taking the extreme upper end of the seat, she placed the child in an upright position, so as not to attract the attention of those who might come in, and supported her with one arm.

The stage moved on for two squares before gaining any accession to the number of its passengers. Then two ladies came in. They looked hard at Adele; also at the child whose face was hidden among her garments. Two men came in next; and then a woman with a little girl. After that, an elderly man entered. He kept looking up and down the cross-streets, and glancing at the passengers on the sidewalks, in a curious, anxious kind of way, as if in search of some one. At last he fixed his eyes on Adele with a gaze so penetrating that it brought the color to her face. From her he looked to the child crouching down in the corner of the seat, and kept gazing at the half-hidden form until Adele by a slight movement threw her body farther forward, so as to conceal it still more from observation.

Where was Adele going with the rescued child? That question the girl could not herself answer. Escape was the first thing, and flight the second. The passing omnibus had given the second stage in the proceeding. All beyond was still in doubt.

One passenger after another left, until only Adele with her charge, and the old gentleman, remained. The curiosity of the latter, it was plain to the girl, had become strongly excited, and she began to feel certain that he would not leave the omnibus, nor permit her to do so, without penetrating the mystery of her sleeping companion. With stealthy glances she examined his face, in order to gain such limited knowledge of his character as was possible under the circumstances. Her impression was favorable.

At last the stage reached the Exchange, and Adele was yet undetermined what to do or which way to go. The possession of an insensible child in such a public place would at once attract notice, and probably draw around her an excited and misjudging crowd. Fear was intruding upon her heart.

The old gentleman stepped forward to pay his fare, and stood just above her, looking down upon her face and at the child.

“Is that little girl asleep?” he asked. The voice was kind, and the tones assured the heart of Adele.

“Yes, sir,” she answered, timidly.

The old man stooped and laid his hand upon the child. Adele bent forward as if to prevent the closer scrutiny he evidently wished to make; but he grasped the sleeper firmly and turned her face to the light. An exclamation of surprise fell from his lips, and he sat down, drawing, as he did so, with resolute hands, the child from Adele’s arms.

“Girl, how came this child in your possession?” he said, sternly.

“Oh, sir!” exclaimed Adele, with eagerness, “do you know to whom she belongs?”

“Maddy! Maddy! Wake up, dear! Wake up!” said the old man, turning from the girl without replying. “What ails her? What is the meaning of this strange sleep?” He addressed Adele again.

“If she belongs to you or yours,” said Adele, “take her home as quickly as possible. I have done my part in rescuing the dove from the hawk,—the lamb from the wolf.”

Uncle John Fleetwood, whom the reader has recognised, needed no further prompting. He had a carriage called quietly, and, taking into it both Adele and his recovered niece, was driven rapidly to the residence of Mr. Dainty. On the way he gained such information as Adele permitted him to glean. It was not by any means satisfactory.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ARREST.

“Found! Found!” The words rang through the house as Uncle John entered, bearing Madeline in his arms. Her rescuer followed with noiseless footsteps and gliding motions.

Responsive cries of joy and the noise of rapid feet were heard from all parts of Mr. Dainty’s dwelling; and by the time Mr. Fleetwood reached the mother’s room an eager crowd surrounded him. Tenderly laying Madeline upon the bed, he exposed her pale, sad-looking countenance to view, the sight of which flooded every face with tears.

“Where is the girl?” he asked, imperatively.

“I am here.” And Adele moved toward the bed

“What is the meaning of this?” he demanded. “What ails our precious darling?”

“The sleep is mesmeric,” answered Adele, in her low, musical voice.

“Mesmeric!” ejaculated Mr. Fleetwood.

“Mesmeric!” exclaimed Mr. Dainty, in anger. “Who has dared to do this?”

“It was Mrs. Fordham,” replied Adele.

“Who is Mrs. Fordham?”

“The woman for whom you were in search,” said Adele, turning to Florence Harper, whom she had recognised.

“Mrs. Jeckyl!” said Florence.

“Devil!” almost thundered Mr. Fleetwood.

“How is this spell to be broken?” asked Florence, coming up to Adele and grasping her arm tightly.

“No one can break it but Mrs. Fordham. She has locked up her senses, and she alone can open them.”

“Cannot you do it?” Florence asked, eagerly.

“No,” was answered, almost mournfully.

“Try.”

“It is useless.” And the girl shook her head.

“Did you see it done?” now asked Mr. Fleetwood, turning from the bed where he had been vainly trying to arouse Madeline to consciousness.

“No, sir. She was alone with the poor little thing.”

“You have seen children put to sleep?” Mr. Fleetwood asked the question.

“Oh, yes, sir. Often.”

“And you’ve seen them wakened?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do as you have seen it done, and wake this child if possible.”

Adele moved forward timidly, and, with evident strong reluctance, and standing over Madeline, commenced making passes with her hands, beginning at the breast and moving them upward over her face. The motions were slow at first, but increased in quickness. This was continued for two or three minutes, but without apparent effect.

“It is of no use,” said the girl, stopping suddenly, and as if in despair. “I have no power. The hand that has been at work here is stronger than mine. You must get Mrs. Fordham.”

“Where is she?”

“At my mother’s house.”

“Where does your mother live?”

“She knows.” And Adele looked toward Florence.

“Take Florence in the carriage,” said Uncle John, speaking to Mr. Dainty, “and go with her to one of the police-stations and get an officer. Then drive with lightning speed to the house where the girl’s mother lives, and have Mrs. Jeckyl arrested and brought here.”

“Come.” Mr. Dainty spoke to Florence, who went hurriedly from the room, and made herself ready in the quickest possible time.

“Will you go?” she spoke to Adele, appearing in a few moments, ready to accompany Mr. Dainty.

“No,” was the quiet answer. “It can do you no good; and harm may come of it to me.”

The carriage which had brought Mr. Fleetwood and Adele from the Exchange was still at the door. Into this Mr. Dainty, after giving his orders to the driver, entered with Florence. At the nearest police-station they obtained an officer, duly instructed to arrest Mrs. Jeckyl if she could be found, and then swept rapidly off toward the northern part of the city. In returning from her previous visit to the house of Mrs. Weir, Florence had particularly noted the names of streets and numbers of houses, so that she had no difficulty in giving the directions needed.

“This is the house,” she said, at last, and the officer signed to the driver to rein up his horses. As when Florence paid her first visit, there was not a sign of life about the dwelling. All the window-shutters were closed, and the dust lay thick upon the sills and door-steps. Grass sprung in little green tufts from between the bricks on the pavement, while small mounds of dirt had grown, by daily light secretions, in the corners where the walls of the house and door-steps came in contact.

“No one lives here,” said Mr. Dainty, as he looked up at the dwelling and noted the many signs of desertion.

“It is the house in which I saw that girl,” replied Florence.

The officer had already rung the bell. He was lifting his hand to ring a second time, when the door was opened cautiously, and the singularly striking face of Mrs. Weir presented itself. On seeing Florence, whom she instantly recognised, she made a movement to shut the door quickly upon her visitors; but this the strong hand of the officer prevented. As he pushed it wide open, Mrs. Weir turned and ran back along the passage.

“She will give the alarm, and the woman may escape,” said Florence, quickly.

At this hint the officer sprung forward, and, grasping her arm tightly, arrested her progress at the bottom of the stairway. Mrs. Weir turned instantly, and fixed her black, glittering eyes upon him.

“What is the meaning of this outrage?” she demanded, in a steady voice.

“No outrage is intended, madam,” said Mr. Dainty, coming forward. “We are in search of a woman named Fordham, who is, as we are informed, in your house.”

“She is not here,” was the firm answer.

“Where can we find her?” he asked, in a disappointed voice.

“I know not. She comes and goes as the wind; and no questions are asked as to her coming or going.”

“Step into this room,” said the officer, motioning to one of the parlor-doors. Mrs. Weir obeyed, and Mr. Dainty and Florence went in with her. Quick glances were thrown around the apartments, but they had no other inmates.

“Remain here,” said the officer. “I will search the house. You stand by the door, sir, and do not permit any one to pass to the street.”

Mrs. Weir made various signs of rebellion; but the officer warned her to be quiet, or he would have her taken to the police-station. This threat really frightened her, and she sunk down, almost nerveless, upon a chair.

“Be quick,” said Mr. Dainty, speaking to the officer. “The woman is tall, with a thin, sallow, evil face, and dark, wicked eyes. You can make no

mistake.”

The officer left the room. It was nearly ten minutes before he came back.

“She is not in the house,” he said, “and I fear has escaped, as I find an outlet in the rear, leading through a court, into another street.”

“I told you that she was not here,” said the woman, a gleam of triumph shooting from her eyes, and her manner exhibiting relief.

“She must be found!” Mr. Dainty spoke with agitation. “We are on her track, and only need to persevere. This is one of her haunts; and to this house my poor child was brought.”

“She will in all probability return here,” said the officer, “if what this woman states is true. But if she were really in the house at the time of our arrival, and made her escape out through the alley and court I have mentioned, we shall have to search for her in another direction. My advice is to send the carriage out of the neighborhood. If the woman should come back and see it standing before the door, she will take the alarm, and not enter.”

“Your suggestion is good,” remarked Mr. Dainty. “I will order the carriage around the square. The driver can wait for us in the next street.” And he went to the door and gave directions accordingly. Returning, Mr. Dainty said to the officer,—

“Shall we all remain here, or will you go for additional aid, so as to extend the search?”

“I think,” replied the officer, “that, as this woman is fully implicated in a very serious crime, I had better take her to the police-station. She is evidently a participant in the business, and shows great anxiety about the escape of her accomplice.”

Mrs. Weir’s sallow face changed to a more ashen hue at this suggestion.

“I do not know,” added the officer, speaking for effect, “that bail, under the circumstances, will be accepted. She will no doubt be imprisoned until all parties in this most horrible outrage are discovered. Her evidence in the

case will be of too much importance for risk of absence, even under bail, to be taken.”

“Indeed, gentlemen,” said Mrs. Weir, now thoroughly frightened, “I am innocent in this matter. Mrs. Fordham, who brought the child here, is an entire stranger. I never saw her until very recently.”

“Where is she now? How can we trace her?” demanded the officer.

“I know not. She went as she came, and I asked no questions.”

“More the fool for that!” said the officer, coarsely. “But I am afraid there is as much of the knave as the fool in the present case. Right kind of people are not in the habit of letting suspicious old women, and total strangers at that, come into their houses and depart at will, yet asking no questions. The story isn’t probable, madam.”

“But true, for all,” answered Mrs. Weir. “It is just as I have said. Mrs. Fordham came and went, and I asked no questions.”

“And why not?”

“Because I—I——”

The woman hesitated.

“Say on.”

“We are commanded not to cast pearls before swine,” she replied, with sudden spirit; “and I shall not cast down things precious to be trampled under your feet.”

“You’ve got some spice in you, I see,” returned the officer, a little amused. “People in your trade generally have. It requires a full portion to carry them through.”

The woman’s face flushed as she said,—

“Explain yourself, sir! What do you mean by my trade?”

“Oh, that of harboring child-stealing vagabonds and the like! This seems to have been your last occupation. But I am not here to bandy sharp words.

My business is to find Mrs. Fordham. If you can direct me to the place where she now is, well; if not, I must arrest you, and you will be held in custody until she is produced,—perhaps longer.”

The woman’s face turned pale again.

At this moment the bell rung. Mrs. Weir stalled up and was moving toward the door.

“Excuse me, madam,” said the officer, laying his hand upon her arm; “but I will attend the door.”

And he drew her firmly back. She made a slight resistance, but the officer held her tightly for an instant.

“Take her in charge, if you please,” he said to Mr. Dainty, “while I see after this visitor.”

Mr. Dainty did not hesitate. Grasping her arm, he said, sternly,—

“Let us have no trifling! This business may cost you dear. Complicity in crime is no light matter, I can tell you.”

The officer was now at the street-door. As he opened it, a tall woman in black, answering in all respects to the description of Mrs. Fordham, stood ready to enter.

“Walk in, madam,” he said.

But she stood still, with her keen eyes reading every lineament of his face. She was not satisfied with its expression.

“Walk in,” repeated the officer.

“No, I thank you. Please say to Mrs. Weir that Mrs. Fordham would like to see her at the door for a moment.”

“Mrs. Weir is engaged,” was the officer’s reply.

“Has her daughter returned?” queried Mrs. Fordham.

“Yes.”

“Ask her to step here.”

By this time Mrs. Fordham had retreated a little, and the officer, seeing that she was about descending the steps, moved suddenly forward, and, throwing one arm around her waist, drew her with a sudden jerk into the passage and shut the door. The movement was so quick, and so unexpected, that the woman was taken entirely off of her guard.

“You are arrested for child-stealing!” said the officer, ere she had recovered from her surprise.

“It is Mrs. Jeckyl!” exclaimed Florence, appearing at the parlor-door.

“Mrs. Jeckyl! Oh, wretch! wretch!” said Mr Dainty, who had released Mrs. Weir, and now confronted the thoroughly-alarmed woman, who, seeing herself completely in the power of these two men, gave up without a struggle.

“Shall I go for the carriage?” said the officer.

“Yes, immediately. But, stay! let me call the carriage, while you hold your prisoner in charge.”

“What are you going to do?” demanded Mrs. Jeckyl, with regaining self-possession, as Mr. Dainty left the house.

“My business,” replied the officer, “is to make this arrest. What follows will depend on the character of evidence which may be produced against you.”

“At whose instance is the arrest made?”

“At the instance of Mr. Dainty, whose child you abducted.”

“I must know your authority!” The woman was growing bolder.

The officer merely took a metal star from his pocket and fastened it against his breast.

The effect was instantaneous. The woman’s eye quailed beneath his steady gaze.

“Come,” said the officer, as the carriage was heard rattling to the door. She hesitated, but moved as she saw his hand rising to grasp her arm.

“Do you wish the other woman arrested, also?” inquired the officer, on meeting Mr. Dainty at the door. “She is without doubt an accomplice.”

“I only want this woman now,” said Mr. Dainty. “If the other is needed we can send for her.”

“But will hardly find her,” muttered the officer. Mr. Dainty did not heed the remark. He was too eager to have Mrs. Jeckyl conveyed to his dwelling to pause on any other considerations. Entering the carriage with Mrs. Jeckyl, Florence, and the officer, he ordered the driver to take them to his residence in the quickest possible time. Heeding the injunction, the driver put the whip upon his horses, and dashed rapidly away.

CHAPTER XXII.

BREAKING THE SPELL.

It was more than an hour from the time Mr. Dainty and Florence left to go in search of Mrs. Jeckyl, before they returned, bringing the woman with them. During all that period not a sign of life, beyond a feeble heart-beat, did Madeline exhibit. Mrs. Dainty was almost wild with distress, and sat over her child, weeping and wringing her hands. Agnes was calmer, but in deep grief; while Uncle John moved about the chamber in which Madeline lay, as restless as an unshrived ghost. Adele sat by the bedside, her face bent down, and hidden from view. Occasionally Uncle John or Mr. Dainty would ask her a question. Then she would look up, exhibiting a pale countenance, and answer in a low voice that was touchingly sad.

Many times had both the mother and Mr. Fleetwood renewed their efforts to break the fearful spell that lay upon the unconscious child. An age of suspense they endured until Mr. Dainty's return.

At last a carriage was heard at the door. Uncle John went to the window.

"They have come!" he said, greatly excited, as he saw Mr. Dainty step to the pavement. "There is an officer!" he added. "And there is Mrs. Jeckyl! Oh, the wretch! yet how glad I am to see her!"

Breathless expectation followed. Adele arose from her place by the bedside, and shrunk away into a remote part of the room; while Agnes came nearer to Madeline, and laid her hand upon her. The mingled sounds of voices and footsteps were heard along the passage and on the stairs, and then the chamber-door opened, and Mr. Dainty entered, followed by Mrs. Jeckyl, the officer, and Florence.

On the stern face of the woman sat a dark, defiant scowl. She looked at Mrs. Dainty, at Agnes, and at Uncle John, with unflinching eyes, but did not speak. Quick glances were then thrown about the room, and Adele, half hidden by one of the window-curtains, was only partially seen, but not recognised.

“For what purpose am I here?” she asked, looking at Mr. Dainty.

“Simply to undo your evil work,” he replied. “You see that child?” and he pointed to the bed.

Mrs. Jeckyl turned her eyes upon the form of Madeline, though scarcely moving her head.

“Well, what of her?” she spoke, very coldly.

“She lies there wholly insensible, as you can see.”

“I am not a physician,” the woman retorted, with a sneer. “Why don’t you send for your doctor?”

“Right for once!” said Uncle John. “Why was not that thought of before?” And he went quickly from the room, and gave direction to one of the servants to go with all possible speed for the doctor.

“This is your work, as we are told,” Mr. Dainty replied, in answer to Mrs. Jeckyl’s remark. “And you are here to unbind what you have bound. And I pray you, in Heaven’s name, to do it speedily!”

Mrs. Jeckyl laughed a low, gurgling, malignant laugh.

“You give me credit for more than I claim,” said she. “I know nothing of your child. If she is sick, call in your physician, as I have already suggested.”

At this moment there was a sudden rustling of the window-curtain, and Adele came forward into the room, her eyes fixed steadily on the face of Mrs. Jeckyl, and her young lips compressed and resolute.

“You do know something of the child.” She spoke out boldly. “For you brought her to my mother’s house. Her present condition is the work of your hands, and you can restore her in a moment if you will.”

Mrs. Jeckyl’s countenance grew almost livid with rage; and she glared at Adele, as if seeking to blast her with her burning eyes. But the young girl stood without a quailing glance, and looked up steadily into her face.

“It is as I say, and you know it.” There was no sign of fear or embarrassment in the voice of the brave young girl.

“Then act quickly!” said Mr. Dainty.

“Oh, Mrs. Jeckyl, help us if you can! Break the spell that rests on our dear child!” Mrs. Dainty clasped her hands and spoke imploringly.

But the woman stirred not from the place where she stood.

“She can do it if she will.” It was Adele who spoke, and her voice was clear and confident.

Mrs. Jeckyl again scowled upon her, like a wild animal at bay.

“I have sent for the doctor,” said Mr. Fleetwood, returning to the room where the excited family stood hovering around the bed on which Madeline lay. “We were simpletons not to have done this before. My faith is stronger in him than in this impostor. It will be found, I think, that Madeline’s unnatural sleep is the effect of some drug, or of fright, or injury.”

A grim smile parted the lips of Mrs. Jeckyl.

“She can bring her to in a moment, if she will,” persisted Adele. “I’ve seen such things done many, many times.”

“No one asked you for information,” said Mrs. Jeckyl, turning in an excited manner toward the girl.

“This is mere trifling,” spoke out the police-officer, sternly, and he advanced to the side of Mrs. Jeckyl. “Why was she brought here?” And he looked toward Mr. Dainty.

“To remove from this child the spell she has cast upon her through some infernal art.”

“So I understood. Very well, madam, let it be done at once.”

Mrs. Jeckyl stood, in evident debate with herself, for some moments.

“If I do as you desire, what then?” She addressed Mr. Dainty.

“Quick! quick! Mrs. Jeckyl!” now broke in Mrs. Dainty. “Oh, save my child! She will die! Break this terrible sleep!”

“I will do it only on one condition,” said the woman.

“Name it,” replied Mr. Dainty.

“I am now in the hands of an officer?”

“You are; and arrested on the serious charge of child-stealing.”

“The condition is this: that I be permitted to leave your house, and that no effort be made to arrest me after my departure.”

“Make no conditions with her,” spoke out Mr. Fleetwood.

“As you like,” answered the woman, coldly.

“I am not sure that I can make conditions now,” said Mr. Dainty. “You are already in the hands of the law.”

“Then I will not touch your child. She may sleep until the day of doom, for me! And she will sleep until I choose to awaken her.”

“Wretch! Fiend! Devil!” ejaculated Uncle John, moving about the room, greatly excited.

“Thank you!” said Mrs. Jeckyl, with a quiet sneer.

Mr. Dainty now drew the police-officer aside, and held a low, hurried conversation with him.

“Restore this child, if it is in your power to do so,” said the latter, turning from Mr. Dainty and approaching Mrs. Jeckyl.

“Only on the terms I have stated,” replied the woman, resolutely.

“I will suffer you to depart from here alone.”

“That will not do. I must have an honorable pledge that no attempt will be made to arrest me after I leave.”

“I shall make no attempt, but simply report what has been done,” said the officer. “If the Chief of Police again issues orders for your arrest, they will be obeyed.”

The woman thought for some moments.

“I may depart at will?” she said, looking from the officer to Mr. Dainty.

“Yes.” Both replied.

She moved to the bedside, uncovered the face of Madeline, and stood for nearly a minute gazing down upon it. All was still as death in the room, and hearts beat in muffled measure. Repressed excitement was intense. Then the woman laid her hands upon the child’s temples, and held them there almost a minute longer, then took both of her hands and clasped them within her own, seemingly to impart the warmth of her own body. After that she began a few slow, upward passes, which were gradually increased in rapidity. A slight convulsive start was the first sign of returning animation; a shudder next ran through the child’s frame; then she moaned plaintively. The anxious group, now bending around the bed, held their breaths. Mrs. Dainty was close beside Mrs. Jeckyl, and the face of Florence Harper hung over Madeline, a little way from that of the necromancer. Now there came the flush of quickening pulses into the child’s face; now its expression began changing to one more pleasant to look upon; now a feeble smile played around the arching lips; and now the lids unclosed, opening slowly, as if just overcoming the pressure of a sweet slumber, and revealing the bright blue eyes beneath.

At this instant the face of Mrs. Jeckyl was withdrawn.

“Mother! Oh, mother! Dear mother!” said Madeline, stretching up her arms and clasping the neck of Mrs. Dainty, who in turn threw her arms around the child, caressing her in the wildest manner, and almost devouring her with kisses.

“Be calm, Madeline, for Heaven’s sake!” whispered Uncle John in the ears of his niece.

“Oh, I have had such a terrible dream!” said Madeline, sobbing, her face still hidden in her mother’s bosom.

“All leave the room but Florence and her mother,” said Mr. Fleetwood, in a whisper. “This crowd will only excite her mind. If she thinks it all a dream for the present, so much the better.”

Acting on this hint, all retired but Florence and Mrs. Dainty. Mrs. Jeckyl was not with them. She had already glided from the chamber, passed down the stairs, and was now hurrying away from the house with footsteps quickened by fear. The officer kept his word, and permitted her to escape.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ANGEL STRONGER THAN THE DEMON.

“I have wronged you, Miss Harper,” whispered Mrs. Dainty.

It cost the weak, proud woman an effort to make this acknowledgment. But Madeline’s arms were around both of their necks, and the child was clinging to both with a half-trembling eagerness. This confession made all the rest easy.

“Return to us,” she added, “and be to my children what you once were.”

“Do come back again!” It was the pleading voice of Madeline. “Oh, I wish you had never gone away!”

Florence felt a shudder run through the child’s body, as if some fearful image had been presented to her mind.

“Say you will come back, and take your old place, Miss Harper,” urged Mrs. Dainty.

The arm of Madeline which was around her mother’s neck withdrew itself and joined the arm that circled the neck of Florence.

“Say yes! Do say yes, Miss Harper!” And the child’s clasping arms were drawn very tightly.

“Yes,” said Florence, as she kissed the child.

“Oh! I am so glad! So glad!” cried Madeline, overcome with joy at this concession. “If you had never gone away!”

“We will be friends,” said Mrs. Dainty, taking the hand of Florence Harper and pressing it warmly. “I did not understand you before. But I see clearer to-day.”

“Let the past be forgotten,” answered Florence. “All are liable to misconception. I was faithful to your children; and I will be so again.”

Then, whispering into the ears of Mrs. Dainty, she added,—

“I fear we are exciting Madeline beyond what is prudent.”

“You are right,” answered the mother. “We are forgetting ourselves.”

Madeline was still on the bed. Gently disengaging the arms that were around her neck, Florence looked smilingly into the face of Madeline, and said, in a cheerful tone,—

“Come, Maddy dear! you’re wide enough awake now, after a long sleep.”

“How long have I been asleep?” the child asked, curiously, glancing, as she spoke, toward the windows. “Is it morning?”

“No: the day is nearly done. It lacks scarcely an hour to sunset.”

“Is it so late?” Madeline looked serious, and her face passed from transient light into shadow.

“Yes. You have slept a long time. But come, dear, you must get dressed for tea.”

Madeline looked up at Miss Harper with a kind of vague wonder in her countenance, and then let her eyes wander slowly about the room, as if searching for some person or object.

“Haven’t I been away from here, Miss Harper?” she inquired, looking at Florence.

“Why do you ask that question?”

“I’m sure it isn’t all just a dream. That Mrs. Jeckyl! Oh, dear! I feel so strangely!” And Madeline laid her hand upon her breast.

“Don’t think of any thing, dear, but the happy present,” said Florence, smiling into the little girl’s face.

But the eyes of Madeline were filling with tears, and their expression had become very sad.

“Oh, it was so dreadful!”

“What was dreadful, Maddy?” her mother asked.

“I don’t know,” she answered, in a bewildered manner. “I saw it all just now; and now it’s gone again.”

“What is gone, love?”

“I thought she was going to kill me.” The child spoke as if to herself.

“Who, Maddy?”

“It was Mrs. Jeckyl. She had me in a room. Oh, dear, mother! I don’t know what’s the matter with me!”

And the child shuddered, while an expression of almost abject fear came into her face.

“You are safe at home, my love,” said Mrs. Dainty, in a soothing voice. “There is no Mrs. Jeckyl here, but kind Miss Harper instead. And she is going to stay with us.”

“That’s best of all,” replied Madeline, partially recovering herself, and looking up into the face of Miss Harper. “I was so sorry when you went away and that dreadful woman came in your place.”

“Won’t you rise now?” said Florence, taking Madeline by the hand and drawing her gently upwards. The child yielded, and sat erect in bed. Mrs. Dainty brought a frock, and a change of under-clothing, and both she and Florence busied themselves in removing the soiled garments of Madeline and replacing them with such as were fresh and clean. The excitement of all this quickened and diverted her mind. When fully attired, and ready to join the anxious, expectant family, Florence said to her,—

“I think your father and Uncle John are in the sitting-room. Shall we go down?”

She held out her hand. Madeline drew back for a moment.

“Come, dear?” Florence spoke cheerily. “I know Uncle John wants to see his pet.”

Madeline took the hand of Miss Harper, who led her down-stairs and into the sitting-room. Mr. Dainty, old Mr. Fleetwood, Agnes, and little George were there. Miss Harper gave each a warning glance, which was understood.

“Wide awake, pet?” said Uncle John, in a cheerful, affectionate voice. “What a nice long sleep you have had!”

Mr. Dainty and Agnes avoided any remark, or, indeed, any exhibition of more than common interest. George ran up to Madeline, kissed her lovingly, and drew his arm around her waist. But he had been cautioned by his sister, and so made no allusion to recent exciting events.

“Georgie,” whispered Madeline, putting her lips close to her brother’s ear, “Miss Harper is coming to live here again.”

“Is she?” responded the little boy, with a suddenly illuminated face.

“Yes, indeed. A’n’t you, Miss Harper?” And Madeline looked up into the face of her governess.

“If you want me?” was the smiling reply.

“Oh, that’s grand!” said George, striking his hands together and jumping a foot from the floor. “Did you hear that, Uncle John?”

“Hear what?” asked the old gentleman.

“Miss Harper is coming back again!” answered the boy. “Oh, I’m so glad!”

Mr. Fleetwood threw an almost grateful look upon Florence, as he said,
—

“You have friends here, Miss Harper. Children are no hypocrites.”

“If this is true, as I hope it is, let me welcome you with a most sincere welcome,” said Mr. Dainty, coming forward and giving his hand to Florence.

Mrs. Dainty entered at the moment. She had lingered in the chamber after Florence left.

“It is true,” she spoke out, with womanly frankness. “I have asked her to return, and she has kindly consented. We shall all know each other better in time, I hope.”

The flushed cheeks, drooping eyes, and unsteady lips of Miss Harper showed emotion, not triumph; and no eye that then read her countenance mistook its true expression.

Uncle John thanked his niece with his eyes, but said nothing.

“A’n’t you glad? I am!” And George danced about the room, in his wild, impulsive way. “Hurrah for Miss Harper, and death on Old Snakes!”

Young America was losing himself.

“Georgie! Georgie?” Agnes spoke in warning and reproof. Mr. Dainty raised his finger; and Uncle John said, “Hush?” But the boy’s blood was up, and he rattled on:—

“But didn’t I give it to her just now? Didn’t I make her mad, though? Old Snakes! I reckon they heard me round the corner. If she comes here again, I’ll shoot her! Old rip! Old hag! Old Snakes!”

“George! Stop this instant!” said Mr. Dainty, in a stern voice.

“Was *she* here?” asked Madeline, her face growing suddenly pale.

Agnes took the boy’s hand and led him away.

“Come with me to the school-room,” said Florence, with sudden animation. “I want to see how it looks there.” And she drew Madeline toward the door. “We had some pleasant times there, hadn’t we, Maddy? Do you remember the stories I used to tell?”

They were already in the passage.

“Oh, yes, indeed!” was answered. “And they were such beautiful stories!”

“Would you like to hear another? I know a great many,” said Florence.

“If you please, Miss Harper. I always love to hear your stories; they make me feel better.”

“Oh, it looks as natural as can be!” said Florence, speaking with animation, as she entered the study-room. “Here is my arm-chair, just in the old place. There! I am in it again, feeling quite at home and comfortable.”

“And I am in my little chair, close by your side, and waiting for a story,” said Madeline, who was already feeling the spirit of her companion and true friend as well as teacher.

“The story, is it?” And Florence bent down and left a kiss upon the sweet, upturned face. “Very well: my promise shall be kept. Now, let me think: what shall the story be?”

Miss Harper lifted her eyes, and sat thoughtful for some moments. Then, reaching her hand toward a table that stood near, she took up a Bible, saying, as she did so,—

“I used to read you some of the stories in this precious volume, and I think you always loved to hear them. Shall it be a Bible story now?”

Florence was looking down upon the face of her pupil. Its expression suddenly changed into one of strong repugnance, and, with an impatient gesture she said,—

“No! I don’t want to hear a Bible story!”

Florence was shocked by the tone and manner of the child more than by her words.

“Not a story from the Divine Book, Maddy dear?” she said, in a voice touched by an irrepressible sadness. “Oh, you cannot mean what you have said! Angels are present with us in the holy word; and they bring to our souls peace and happiness. Let me read to you about the birth of our Saviour in Bethlehem.”

Miss Harper opened to the second chapter of Matthew: as she did so, Madeline turned her head away. Miss Harper began,—

“Now, when Jesus was born——”

The instant these words reached the ears of Madeline, she sprung upon the volume in the hands of Miss Harper, and would have torn the open pages, if she had not been prevented. Her countenance was flushed almost to congestion, and her eyes gleamed with an evil light.

“Don’t read that! I won’t hear it! I hate it!” she exclaimed, passionately.

Florence felt a cold shudder run through her frame. Very still she sat, and silent, holding the hands of Madeline. For nearly a minute the hush as of death pervaded the room. Then she released the passive hands she held, and laid one of her own upon the child’s head, smoothing the soft hair with a gentle pressure.

“Once—it is not many years ago—there was a dear little baby.” The lips of Florence were close to the ears of Madeline, her voice was very low, the tones even and tenderly modulated. “I do not think there was ever a sweeter baby born into the world. It had the roundest of rosy cheeks, that were softer than any velvet; eyes as blue as spring’s first violets; and rich brown hair clustering, in the tiniest little curls that ever were seen, all over its head. As this beautiful baby lay in its mother’s arms, it looked like a cherub more than like an earth-born baby.”

Florence paused, for Madeline had placed both hands over her ears, so that not a word could reach the sense of hearing. She waited, with forced calmness, until the hands were removed. Madeline did not look up into her face, but kept her eyes resting on the floor.

“There were other attendants on that baby, besides those visible to human eyes.”

The hands of Madeline were raised quickly, but the closing words of the sentence arrested the movement.

“The mother did not see them; the father did not see them: but still they were there.”

The hands of Madeline began to fall, and her ear slightly turned, listening, toward Florence.

“I said they were not visible to human eyes,” resumed Miss Harper. Madeline looked up, beguiled into wonder. “But they were as really present, and as near the baby, as its parents. No,—not both of them.” The last sentence was spoken in a changed tone, as if it involved some special meaning.

“Not both? Who were they?” asked Madeline, her interest beginning to be excited.

“The one that stood near the babe,” said Miss Harper, “had the form of a beautiful woman just passed upward from sweet young girlhood. Her countenance was lovelier, and purer in expression, than that of any face ever seen by you in a picture. She bent over the babe with clasped hands, gazing down upon it with looks of wondering love; and when it smiled her face grew suddenly radiant. The other,” (Miss Harper’s voice fell lower, and took on a graver tone,) “stood in a distant corner of the room, almost crouching down, as if held there by some superior power. Very different was she from the pure being who bent over the child. Her face wore a frowning, malignant expression, instead of curling golden hair gracefully falling around her neck and upon her shoulders, dark, tangled locks stood out from her head, or crept down over her face, like serpents.”

“Who were they?” asked Madeline, now thoroughly interested.

“One was the baby’s guardian angel; the other, an evil spirit.”

Madeline raised her eyes to the face of Miss Harper with looks of deeper wonder.

“The angel’s presence,” resumed Florence, “was alone sufficient to hold that evil spirit, who wished to hurt the tender babe, at a distance; just as good affections in our hearts have power to hold the bad and selfish ones so far away that they can do us no possible harm. Day by day that infant grew larger, and brighter, and happier; but never for a moment did the angel remove, nor for a moment cease to spread around the babe a sphere of tender love, of innocent and holy calmness. And the mother, and all who drew near to look upon the babe or to hold it like a precious thing in their arms, felt this angelic sphere as something tender, pure, and loving.”

“But what of the bad spirit?” asked Madeline, with increasing interest.

“The bad spirit,” answered Florence, “remained also, and its evil eyes were always upon the babe. But the presence of that celestial being kept her ever at the same distance, and seemed to hold her there, as if by a powerful arm. She could not draw near to the babe, nor even make it aware of her presence.

“Day by day the child continued to grow and to become more beautiful, until four months of its sweet life had passed. Still the angel and the bad spirit kept unweariedly their guard over and watch upon the babe. Occasionally a slight shade would now cross the angel’s face, and always at the same instant a gleam of pleasure would lighten the dark countenance of the watchful fiend.”

“A fiend, Miss Harper?” There was a slight pallor on the face of Madeline, and the interest it expressed was verging on to the painful.

“I will call one a fiend, as I call the other an angel. To do good is angelic, while to do evil is fiendlike. None but a fiend could take pleasure in doing harm to an innocent babe. Well, as I was saying, after this darling baby was a few months old, the angel’s face would at times be shadowed; and then a gleam of malignant pleasure would flash over the countenance of the attendant fiend. And now I will tell you the reason. Do you wish to hear?”

“Oh, yes, Miss Harper! Tell me the reason,” answered Madeline, all attention.

“The babe, even as early as I have said, displayed an evil temper. It grew angry, pushed its mother away, and resisted her. This troubled the guardian angel, and this it was that gave the fiend delight. But these fits of passion were but transient, passing away as the morning cloud and the early dew, under the sunny influence of that blessed guardian angel. The fiend was still repelled,—still kept at a distance. But she wearied not with waiting. She knew that her time would come,—that the angel would not always have power to hold her in the distance.”

Miss Harper paused, and looked into the face of Madeline. There was something in its deeply-interested expression that a little puzzled her.

“Shall I go on?” she asked.

“The fiend didn’t hurt the baby, Miss Harper? The angel didn’t go away?” Her voice was earnest almost to eagerness.

“The angels never leave us of their own accord. We drive them away, and then, instantly, evil spirits take their places. This is so from childhood, even to old age. It was so with the baby of whom I am telling you; it is so with your brother Georgie now; so with you; so with me; so with every one. We choose our own companions, always; and they are evil or good. No angel can be near to us when we are angry with our brother, when we hate, when we are selfishly seeking our own pleasure in a total disregard of others; and the moment these bad affections push the angel attendants away, evil spirits draw near, and by their malignant power increase our anger, hate, and selfishness, and make us wretched in consequence; for bad passions always produce unhappiness.”

Madeline looked very serious,—almost sad.

“Is it so with all of us?” she asked, in a low voice.

“It is so with all of us, dear. But shall I tell you more about this baby?”

“Yes.”

“No, Maddy, the evil spirit was not permitted to do the baby harm: the loving angel appointed to be the guardian of its infantile life did not depart.”

“But you said that the bad spirit knew that her time would come?” interrupted Madeline.

Florence sighed. “Am I bearing her beyond her depth?” she said, questioning with herself. There was a moment or two of silence. Then she resumed:—

“The baby had a good mother, and to her mind the angel was all the while suggesting right ways of influencing her precious darling; and so, as the babe grew older, its mind clearer, and its experience wider, that loving mother was a partner with the angel in guarding it from evil and in sowing in its young mind the seeds of goodness. Now, Maddy, just think for a moment of the mind of a babe as a garden all prepared in the spring-time

for seeds. If true thoughts and gentle and good affections are sown in this garden, good and beautiful plants will spring up; but, if false thoughts and bad affections are scattered upon the ground, poisonous weeds will grow. You can see that?"

"Oh, yes," answered Madeline.

"Well, as I was saying, the baby had a good mother; and she sowed good seeds in its infantile mind, and as these began to grow the angel saw pure and beautiful things there, and so kept very near. If weeds had been suffered to spring up in this garden and hide or destroy the heavenly plants, the angel would have been repelled by these evil things, while the bad spirit, seeing in them what was delightful, would have approached, and hurt the baby by stimulating them to a more rapid growth. Do you understand my meaning?"

"I think so."

"One of the first things that was taught to this baby, as its mind began to open, was the existence of God."

Florence spoke low and reverently, while her eyes were fixed upon the countenance of her attentive listener. She saw a slight impulse strike the child's features, and a flush of sudden feeling veil them.

"Of that good God who had sent his pure angel to be its guardian," she added, in a still lower and more reverent voice.

The light returned again to Madeline's face.

"How shall I do this?" asked the mother, in her own heart; and the reply came. She did not know that it was the angel's voice that gave the wished-for answer. So she took the little one's hands in hers one evening, clasped and raised them upward, and said, 'God bless little Amy.' The baby was too young to repeat the words of her mother, or even to comprehend their full meaning; but the angel, who bent very near, breathed a holy feeling into her tender spirit, and she had a faint impression of something higher than the visible, and up to which she might look for blessing. How sweetly the angel smiled at this! how darkly frowned the watchful fiend! The first idea of God was given; and that was a great gain, for the angel could now be more

intimately present with the child in this idea. So far the angel was triumphing over the fiend.”

“Are angels present with us when we think of God?” asked Madeline, interrupting Miss Harper, and speaking with the manner of one who felt an interest in the question.

“If we think of him reverently, they are.”

“How, reverently, Miss Harper?”

“As great, and good, and holy,” said Florence; “for then we shall desire to be like him, and angels are always present with us when we desire to be good.”

“And do they help us to be good?”

“Always. To them it is the most delightful of employments.”

The eyes of Madeline drooped. She sighed faintly, and remained silent. Florence waited for some moments, and then went on, speaking slowly and impressively:—

“Tenderly loved and wisely guarded, the first moons of the baby’s life waxed and waned, and at last a golden year of its life was completed. The idea of God, once conceived in the child’s mind, grew daily into a more distinct impression. Her guardian angel never let that first, best impression become dim, and the good mother was a co-worker with the angel.

“‘Mamma, read,’ said little Amy, one day. She was just beginning to repeat a few small words. The best book in the world was lying on the table, close by the mother’s side, and she turned to it and let her eyes rest upon the open page. Then a strange thing happened. Both the angel and the evil spirit drew near to the child. Tender interest and holy love were on the face of the angel; anger, hate, and fierce determination on the countenance of the fiend. The angel knew that every sentence from the holy book that entered the child’s mind and fixed itself in her memory would remain there, a link in the chain by which her spirit might be joined to heaven; and the fiend knew that just in the degree that her mind was filled with the holy precepts and divine narratives of the Bible would she pass harmless through the trials

and temptations of her future life and rise superior to the powers of darkness. And so the angel bent with the tenderest solicitude over the child, while the evil spirit strove to disturb her mind or awaken in it some evil passion. But the influence of good was strongest, and as the mother read the little one leaned her head and listened with fixed attention. Thus she read:—‘Now, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.’ The evil spirit could not abide in the presence of this word of truth, as it entered the mind of an innocent little child, and so retired to a distance, almost writhing in hatred and pain. The mother read on:—‘When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda, for out of thee shall come a governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently at what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child, and when ye have found him, bring me word, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and lo! the star which they saw in the east went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child, with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him; and when they had opened their treasures they presented unto him gifts,—gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.’”

Florence had triumphed; for Madeline was listening to this story of the Nativity with deep attention. And so she kept on, repeating from memory the whole chapter.

“And now,” continued Florence, “not a day passed in which that innocent little one did not ask her mother to read; and the mother read to her, at least once every day, some story from the Bible, so that, as she grew older, her memory was full of precious histories, in the thought of which her guardian angel could be present with her. She loved to hear of little Samuel; of

Joseph, who was sold into Egypt by his brethren; and of the blessed Saviour, who went about doing good.

“And the child grew, and grew, until babyhood was passed and the sweetness of infancy gave place to a more earnest life. But always the day opened or closed with some lesson from the holy book; and, when that was read, the angel drew very near to the child, while the fiend shrunk afar off. No matter how many selfish feelings the evil spirit had been successful in awakening through the day, thus grieving the watching angel; when the Bible was read her power was gone, and she shrunk away in fear from its divine brightness.

“And, still as the child grew, her mother taught her to pity the poor, the sick, and the suffering, and to find pleasure in doing kind offices instead of only desiring to have good things for herself. In all these teachings the angel was very near, helping the mother, and overcoming the fiend’s influence, which was ever active. Often it happened that the fiend would approach the child in an unguarded moment, and fill her mind with selfish thoughts or stir her heart with an evil passion. For a little while she would have power over her; but the angel had a dwelling-place in the child’s mind, and, entering, would subdue the enemy and cast her out. What was that dwelling-place, Madeline?”

Miss Harper looked lovingly into the face of her earnestly-listening pupil.

“I don’t know,” was answered.

“Shall I tell you?”

“Oh, yes. I wish to know.”

“Why?”

Madeline did not answer.

“Would you like angels to have a dwelling-place in your mind?”

“Oh, yes, Miss Harper.”

“That dwelling-place,” said Florence, very impressively, “was formed of the blessed words of truth she had learned from the Bible. Into these the

angel could enter and abide; and she did enter, and by the power of celestial love drove out the fiend.”

“Long years afterward,” continued Florence, “when the child, grown to be a woman, had taken her place in the world as one of its actors, meeting its cares, trials, crosses, and temptations, she was able to overcome in all the life-battles she was called to fight. Evil spirits assailed her, and sought the destruction of her soul. They were around her in the morning, at mid-day and evening. But angels were also present with her, and present with power, for in her memory they found passages from the word of God, and they abode in them with all their protecting influence, and helped her to fight the enemies of her soul, even to their final overthrow. I very much fear that, if her mother had not filled her memory with stories and precepts from the Book of books, these evil assailants from hell would have overcome in her great life-battle. But she had angels on her side; and God’s angels are always more powerful than demons. One of these blessed beings can put ten thousand evil spirits to flight. Oh, then, let us make them our friends! Let us prepare dwelling places for them in our hearts, where they may always abide and shield us from the powers of darkness. They dwell with us in the divine teachings of this holy book.”

And Florence, speaking with tender solemnity, lifted the Bible from the table and held it open before Madeline.

“Fill your mind with its heavenly lessons. Let the angels come to you and make their abode with you in its divine precepts. Take it to your heart, dear Madeline!”

Madeline stood almost rigid for a moment or two, as if life were suspended. Then, with a gush of tears, she caught at the book and clasped it passionately to her breast.

“Amen! God be praised!” The lips of Florence parted, as her wet eyes sprung upward: there was a low murmur on the air; and these were her words of thankfulness.

CHAPTER XXIV. AN UNEXPECTED REVELATION.

In the excitement attendant on the restoration of Madeline to conscious life, Adele had been forgotten. Uncle John was the first to remember her. It was immediately after the withdrawal of Florence with her charge to the study-room.

“Where is the girl?” he asked, suddenly glancing around.

No one could answer the question.

“Did you leave her in your chamber?”

Uncle John spoke to his niece.

“I do not think she is there,” replied Mrs. Dainty.

“I hope she has not left the house,” said Uncle John. There was concern in his voice, and he moved, as he spoke, toward the door. “We are largely in her debt, and she, I think, needs our protection.”

“She shall have it!” Mr. Dainty spoke with emphasis. “Go, Madeline, and see if she has remained in your room.”

Mrs. Dainty went to her chamber.

“Not here!” She uttered the words just audibly. A few moments she stood, her eyes glancing around the apartment, when a low sound, like a repressed sob, came to her ears. Stepping forward, she drew aside one of the heavy window-curtains. There sat Adele, crouching upon a low ottoman, her face buried in her hands.

“We were afraid you had gone,” said Mrs. Dainty, speaking in a kind voice, and laying her hand gently on the girl’s head.

Adele looked up, but did not answer. Her singularly beautiful face, in which the softness of childhood still blended with woman’s firmer outlines,

was pale and very sad. Mrs. Dainty, whose nerves were still all ajar, felt something like awe steal into her heart as she looked upon the countenance which was upturned to hers.

Just then Uncle John, whose anxiety about the young stranger would not permit him to await the return of his niece, entered the room. His face brightened as he saw Adele.

“Ah, my brave girl, you are here. We were afraid you had left the house,” he said, encouragingly.

Adele arose, and stood, with timid, downcast look, before Mrs. Dainty and Mr. Fleetwood.

“We owe you more than thanks,” said the latter. “The service you have rendered us is beyond all price. How shall we repay the obligation?”

Adele raised her dark eyes and looked steadily into the face of Mr. Fleetwood. There was a strange depth and beauty in those eyes, and something mournful and pleading. Mr. Fleetwood felt their appeal.

“What is your name?” he asked.

“Adele,” replied the girl.

“Adele—what?”

A slight flush came into her face; but she did not answer until after a silence of several moments. She then said,—

“Adele Weir.”

“Do you wish to return to your mother?”

This question disturbed the girl. There was evidently a strong mental conflict.

“If mother was as she used to be. But——”

The feelings of Adele overmastered her, and she again covered her face. Shuddering sobs almost convulsed her frame. They were not loud, but repressed as if by the whole strength of her will.

“If mother was as she used to be.” Self-possession was restored, after a brief struggle. “But she is not, and I am afraid never will be. Since she became a medium, she has not been like my mother of old. The spirits tell her a great many strange things, and she believes all, and does just what they say. Oh, dear! it is dreadful! I have not had a happy moment since the knockings, and writings, and strange doings began. And I don’t like the people who come to our house. Some of them, I know, are not good. There’s a Mr. Dyer. His heart is full of wickedness, I am sure, for none but a wicked man ever had such greedy eyes. I was not afraid of him, but more of myself, when he came near me. I felt as if I would like to kill him.”

“Did he ever offer you an insult?” asked Mr. Fleetwood.

“Once.”

“What of it?”

“I rebuked him with such strong words that he seemed frightened for a moment. I don’t know how I looked: it might have been murder, for I felt it.”

Adele had grown excited.

“Who else visit at your mothers house?” further inquired Mr. Fleetwood.

“Oh, a great many people. Circles meet there every night, and sometimes every day. But I never saw any good that came of it all. The spirits tell strange things, but I can’t see that any one is made better. Mother hasn’t been made better, I know. I am afraid her right reason is gone. When I was a very little girl, she belonged to the church, and used to read the Bible a great deal. She always read it aloud when I was with her; and so I got my thoughts full of verses and stories, until I could say almost chapters by heart. But mother believes now that spirits are making a higher revelation than the Bible, and that its teachings are of but small account in comparison. I am afraid that if the spirits were to tell her to do almost any thing that is forbidden in the Bible, she would do it. Isn’t it dreadful?”

“Dreadful indeed!” said Mr. Fleetwood. “But you believe in the Bible?”

“Oh, yes,—yes! At first they put me to sleep, and tried to make a medium of me. I believe that I did write and talk some. But when I got back into my real self again I had such awful feelings that I was sure it must be wrong. And so I prayed God to teach and help me. And I think he did. Their power over me grew less and less; and at last I was able to throw it all off. Oh, sir, I do not think it would be right for me to go back again.”

“You must not return,” answered Mr. Fleetwood, positively. “God heard your prayer, verily, and has granted you a deliverance.”

The lashes of the girl’s eyes fell slowly down upon her cheeks, and there came into her face a meek, sad, yet thankful, expression.

“You will remain here for the present,” said Mr. Fleetwood. “To-morrow we will talk over your future, and decide what is best to be done. Think of us as your true friends, and fully depend upon us for protection. If your heart is right, Adele,—that is, if you wish to be and to do right,—you have nothing to fear, and every thing to hope.”

“I have no other desire!” was the tearful answer.

Dusky Night was beginning to weave her web of darkness. Shadows were gathering in the rooms: the stillness of twilight came stealing down upon sense and feeling. Half an hour later, and the family were gathered at the tea-table. There were Mr. and Mrs. Dainty, Uncle John Fleetwood, Agnes, Madeline, and George.

“What will you have, dear?” said Mr. Dainty, looking toward Madeline, after he had helped Uncle John and his oldest daughter, Agnes.

“I don’t want any thing,” she answered, her face slightly reddening as she spoke, and her eyes turning toward the door, as if she were expecting some one.

“This toast looks very nice, Maddy. Let me give you a piece?” Mr. Dainty spoke with gentle persuasion.

“Can’t I eat with Miss Harper?” And Madeline pushed her chair a little way back from the table.

Mrs. Dainty's eyes met those of her husband. Her face grew troubled and irresolute; his evinced a puzzled state of mind. Uncle John looked at his niece, and mutely signed for her to say yes.

"If you prefer doing so," answered Mrs. Dainty, replying to Madeline. "But I would rather have you take tea with us."

Consent and objection at the same time only tended to push the child's mind further away from an even balance. She had stepped back from the table with a light motion as consent passed her mother's lips, but stood suddenly still, with a clouded face, at the objection.

"Run along, dear," said Uncle John, in a cheerful voice. "Mother says yes."

Madeline moved a pace or two, and then stopped. Her chin was drawn down, her brow contracted, her lips pouting.

"Go, go, dear! Mother is willing." Mrs. Dainty saw her error, and now, hoping to retrieve it, spoke with pleasant animation.

Madeline looked up at her mother, as if in doubt of her sincerity. Mrs. Dainty smiled tenderly, and said, in a loving voice,—

"Kiss me first, dear."

Madeline's face brightened. The kiss was given, and then she went away with light footsteps.

"I'm going to wait too," said George, sturdily, as he pushed back his chair. "I'd rather eat with Miss Harper than with anybody in this house."

And, before his father could interfere to stop him, Young America was out of the dining-room.

"I don't like that." Mrs. Dainty looked annoyed.

"Children are all democrats," said Uncle John.

"I don't wish mine to be democrats," answered Mrs. Dainty, curtly.

“They will get no harm from eating with Florence,—my word for that,—but good, rather.”

“But I don’t wish my children to eat with dependants and inferiors.” Mrs. Dainty drew up her chest and drew down her chin, and looked all the aristocratic importance she knew how to assume. In the eyes of Uncle John she succeeded in attaining simply the ridiculous. Quick indignation thrilled along every nerve of his body, and cutting rebuke came instantly to his tongue. But prudence whispered a timely caution in his ears, and he only said,—

“This is neither the time nor the place for discussing that question, Madeline. But after tea I will have something to suggest.”

“On what subject?” inquired Mrs. Dainty, showing the existence of a no very amiable mood.

“On that which is of most interest to us all,—the good of these children,” replied Uncle John. “What is best for them is best to do. I think that is a plain proposition.”

Mrs. Dainty was in part disarmed, and so made no answer. But she did not look as if she were in any better frame of mind. The evening meal was concluded in silence.

CHAPTER XXV. A REVELATION.

Mr. and Mrs. Dainty and Uncle John sat alone in the library, into which they had passed from the tea-table. Uncle John referred to the remark of his niece about the children eating with inferiors. He spoke with unusual sobriety of manner, and in a voice subdued far below its ordinary tone; for Mr. Fleetwood was not only a man of quick feelings, but one who rarely took special trouble in the way of concealment.

“In what respect, Madeline,” he asked, in opening the conversation, “do you think the children will suffer injury by sitting at the same table with Miss Harper? Don’t be annoyed at the question. Don’t let feeling obscure your mind. There is much of vital importance involved in this matter. Let us come to its consideration moved solely by a desire to see what is right. You are the mother of these children, and your interest in them should be higher than your regard for any social usage or for any mere prejudice. You spoke just now of Florence as an inferior and a dependant.”

Uncle John paused.

“Well, is she not?” Mrs. Dainty looked steadily into the eyes of Mr. Fleetwood, with an expression that said, My question settles that proposition.

“In what is she inferior?” asked Uncle John.

“Your question is absurd, and annoys me,” replied Mrs. Dainty, with sudden feeling.

“Let us put all excitement away, Madeline,” said the old man. “It dims perception; and too much is involved just now for either reason or perception to be under a cloud. My question is not absurd, but one upon the right answer to which hang, just now, momentous things. In what, then, is Florence inferior to your children? Is her mind less pure, her intellect of a lower range, her tastes less cultivated, her accomplishments defective in

comparison, her love of truth, her honor, her sense of religious duty, below that of your children?"

"She belongs to a lower grade in society," answered Mrs. Dainty. "And she is, in this family, only as a hireling."

"Madeline!" (Uncle John's feelings betrayed him into more excitement than he wished to exhibit,) "if you had the wealth of a Rothschild, you could not buy her services! No money-consideration has led her back to this house; and I question much whether she will accept pay for any service she renders."

"Then," said Mr. Dainty, speaking for the first time, "she cannot remain. I will have no one's labor as a gratuity. We are not paupers!"

"If you can supply her place to the children," was Uncle John's reply, "she will step aside, pleased, I am sure, to retire from a position in which she is so poorly appreciated."

"I value her in her place," said Mr. Dainty,— "value her beyond all price. Amount of compensation need be no barrier to her remaining with the children. But if she demand an equality of position with us the case is settled at once."

"You put my own thoughts into words," said Mrs. Dainty.

"She has demanded nothing," replied Uncle John,— "suggested nothing, intimated nothing. I saw her, and told her of our trouble. She came, at my solicitation, to help us; and her services can never be repaid. Her presence in the house seemed like the presence of an angel. You asked her to remain, and she consented, but without stipulation. And now, in the beginning of this restored relationship, it is for us to consider well the subject and to define her position. The higher we lift her, so far as external things are concerned, the greater power for good will she possess. The teacher, guide, and daily companion of our children should be our social equal. How else can the governess, to whom so high an office is delegated, lift them up to our level? An inferior the companion and instructor of our children! Think of it. Can the coarse, unskilled hands of an inferior mould into forms of spiritual beauty the yielding and impressible elements of a child's mind,— that sublime structure over which angels bend in silent wonder? An inferior

for this work! God forbid! Choose, rather, the wisest and the best, and give her the place of honor in your household. Honor her for her gifts and graces; and your children, honoring her also, will be drawn within the circle of her heavenly attractions. Edward! Madeline! There is an angel in your house to-day. You cannot hold her by the rough hands of gain; she will not be bribed to stay: let me beg of you, then, to reach out to her the right hand of a glad welcome. Agnes, George, and Madeline have already perceived her true quality. Confirm their perceptions by your free acknowledgment, and her influence over them will be immeasurably increased.”

“What do you mean, Uncle John? Speak out in plain words,” said Mrs. Dainty.

“Put her upon a social equality with yourself.”

“How?”

“If she were your sister, what then?”

“She is not.”

“But if she were? Then she would sit with you at table; she would meet your friends; she would be a trusted companion.”

“She is *not* my sister,” answered Mrs. Dainty.

“Suppose she were the daughter, or adopted daughter, of a valued friend or wealthy citizen?”

“That would alter the case. But she is not.”

“Are you sure?” Uncle John’s voice fell to a lower tone, and had in it a quiver of feeling.

“I am sure,” said Mrs. Dainty, with confidence.

Uncle John let his eyes sink to the floor. It was plain that there was something held back in his thoughts.

“I wish,” he said at length, almost sadly, “that I could help you to see below the surface of things,—that you were able to tell gold from tinsel, worth from its counterfeit. All true value lies in quality. You know the

quality of Florence Harper. Honor the good, then. Be independent in your sphere of life. Set the noble example of being just. You can afford to do so. Let it be seen as a new thing, and worthy of emulation, that in choosing a companion and instructor for your children you take one worthy to sit by your side and share your favor and confidence. You cannot see into the mind of an inferior and a dependant as you can into the mind of one who is regarded as an equal.”

But Uncle John could not lift the minds of Mr. and Mrs. Dainty up into the clear-seeing region that his own occupied.

“It is all in vain to press that view,” said his niece. “There are certain social distinctions that must be maintained. As to Miss Harper, if her presence as a governess in our family is to be at the cost of your constant interference in the matter of position, I shall be driven to the necessity of dismissing her from my service.”

The little head of Mrs. Dainty balanced itself firmly, and she looked dignified and composed. But she was not prepared for the change that instantly appeared in Uncle John’s manner. He stood up very erect, with a firm, decided manner, and said, like a man in earnest,—

“You will not, I presume, reverse your present decision?”

“I will not,” replied the lady.

“Then Florence cannot remain.” Mr. Fleetwood spoke as by authority.

“I can’t see,” said Mrs. Dainty, “that you have any right to control her movements.”

“The time is coming, mayhap, when you will see. For the sake of your dear children,”—the old man’s voice became unsteady,—“whom I love, with all their faults, almost as well as if they were my own, I consented to let Florence take a position in your family that you regard as an inferior one _____“

”*You* consented!” interrupted the niece, with some asperity and some surprise.

“Yes, I consented,—or rather, constrained her to the act.”

“You! What is the meaning of this, Uncle John? What did you know of Florence Harper before she came into this house?”

“Enough to make me class her with the best and noblest of women! And her conduct here has only confirmed this estimate of her character.”

“I wish you would speak out more plainly, Uncle John.” The haughty manner of Mrs. Dainty was breaking down.

“Her mother’s maiden name was Florence Williams,” said the old man, in a low, quiet voice.

Mrs. Dainty’s face showed a slight pallor.

“You remember her?”

“Yes.”

“The daughter is as pure and true, as refined and accomplished, as was her mother. Now you understand me. In heart, she is my next akin. If I were her father, I could not love her more. The indignities she has suffered in this house, and at your hands, Madeline, have cut me sharply, and they pain, even now, like freshly-opened wounds. It will be hard for me either to forget or forgive them, for they struck like arrows, in tenderest places.”

Mrs. Dainty was speechless with surprise, and the pallor of her countenance increased. Mr. Dainty ventured no remark.

“I did not wish to make this revelation now,” said Mr. Fleetwood. “But you have forced it upon me. My hope was that you would be clear-seeing enough to comprehend her true character, and give her a place by your side because she was worthy to sit there. I thought that you would be able to comprehend the force of what I said just now about the importance of making your children’s trusted companion and instructor your social equal, in order that she might all the while be lifting them up toward the elevated position you desired them to occupy. But pride obscured true perception. And so I have been forced to an earlier declaration than I desired of my adopted daughter’s true relation.”

“Adopted daughter!” Mrs. Dainty looked confounded.

“Even so, Madeline. Even so! And, as I have said, if she were my own child I could not love her more tenderly. True, wise, noble-hearted, self-abnegating girl! To me it is a cause of wonder that your eyes were not able to see the angel in your house.”

“I am bewildered, Uncle John,” said Mrs. Dainty, greatly subdued. “Leave me now, that I may collect my thoughts.”

“As you collect them,” replied Mr. Fleetwood, “I pray you to examine each with the closest care. Only true thoughts lead to right actions. Let there be no error in your summing up,—no fatal defect in your conclusions. There are two paths diverging before you: Madeline, spoiled child of a dear sister! beware, lest you take the wrong one!”

And he went, in evident agitation, from the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

REVIEWING THE MATTER.

“That alters the case,” Mrs. Dainty spoke suggestively, raising her eyes from the floor, and looking at her husband. It was nearly five minutes after Uncle John had left the library.

“Yes, that alters the case,” was the half-dreamy response of Mr. Dainty. “That alters the case,” he repeated, and then relapsed into silence.

So far they were agreed.

“That artful girl——”

Mrs. Dainty paused, for she was not entirely certain in regard to her husband’s present estimate of Miss Harper.

“Do you think her artful?” inquired Mr. Dainty looking at his wife.

“See what influence she has gained over Uncle John.”

“That may be explained on other grounds,” said Mr. Dainty.

“What are they?”

“He has himself referred to them.”

“I thought he had forgotten Florence Williams years ago, or that, if he remembered her at all, it was with indifference or dislike. She jilted him meanly. But I was always glad of it.”

“Madeline,” said Mr. Dainty, speaking in a decided way, “we cannot change the present condition of things: that each of us may see at a glance. And the question for us to ponder is, can we afford to let our feelings rule, and so break with Uncle John? There is no use in beating around the bush. No use in fretting ourselves. The horns of our dilemma are visible as the sun at noonday, and we must make our election. Uncle John has made his: that is certain.”

“And do you really think he will give us and our children up for that girl?” said Mrs. Dainty.

“I am sure of it. Did you not see how he was moved when he said that he loved her as if she were his own child? I marked it well. I have seen him disturbed a hundred times in my life, but never as he was this evening.”

Mrs. Dainty sighed deeply.

“We shall have to humor him,” said Mr. Dainty.

“And let that upstart triumph over me!” Mrs. Dainty burst into tears. Pride could not endure the thought.

“Are you not prejudiced against her, Madeline? She has never seemed to me presuming.”

Before Mrs. Dainty could reply, the library-door was pushed open, and Madeline came gliding in. From her manner it was plain that she had come to make a request, and also plain that she was in doubt as to its reception.

“Mother,” she said, as she paused a few steps from Mrs. Dainty.

“Well, dear?”

“Can’t I——” The child hesitated, and her face colored.

“Say on, dear.”

“Can’t I sleep with Miss Harper?”

A strongly-uttered negative was on the lip of Mrs. Dainty, when a warning look and gesture from her husband forced her to keep silence.

“Can’t I, mother?” urged the child. “Say yes. Do, mother!”

Madeline was unusually earnest.

“Why do you wish to sleep with Miss Harper?” asked her father.

“Oh, because she is good, and I love her.”

“Don’t you love sister Agnes?”

“Yes, I love her.” The tone of Madeline’s voice fell.

“Isn’t she good?”

“Not like Miss Harper.”

“Not like Miss Harper?”

“No.”

“What is the difference, darling?” And Mr. Dainty, interested in spite of himself, drew an arm around Madeline and pressed her to his side.

“God has made her good,” said the child, speaking low and reverently.

This answer sent a strange thrill through the heart of Mrs. Dainty. The father asked no other question.

“Can’t I sleep with her to-night, mother? Say yes, just for to-night.”

“Yes, for to-night,” answered Mrs. Dainty, speaking as one constrained.

Madeline threw her arms around her mother’s neck, and, kissing her, said, in a light, fluttering voice,—

“Oh, I’m so glad!” Then she flew away, like a happy bird in the warm spring sunshine.

“There is one thing very certain, Madeline,” said Mr. Dainty, as the child vanished from the room: “Miss Harper’s influence upon the children is good, and for their sakes, if no other considerations were urged, we had better let Uncle John have his way. We can tolerate her.”

Mrs. Dainty shook her head.

“Toleration is not going to do,” she answered. “Entire social equality is demanded; and nothing less will satisfy either of them.”

“I am not sure that Miss Harper has demanded any thing. Uncle John said she had not, and that she was here only upon his strong solicitation. It is barely possible, Madeline, that you have misunderstood her from the beginning. At least, one thing is now certain. Her social position will be

changed by Uncle John's formal adoption. She will be lifted to our level, and society will recognise her. So far we will be all right with the world."

"There is something in that," said Mrs. Dainty, a trifle softened. "But will she remain as governess to the children?"

"We can sink the word 'governess.' Let her be their companion and instructor."

"Only another name for the same thing," remarked Mrs. Dainty. "The position is menial."

"I have thought differently, since Uncle John's remarks a little while ago," said Mr. Dainty. "They struck me as having great force."

"What did he say? I was so excited and outraged that I scarcely comprehended him."

"He said that the teacher, guide, and companion of our children must be socially equal, or she cannot lift them up to our level. And he asked, with to me startling emphasis, 'Can the coarse, unskilled hands of an inferior mould into forms of spiritual beauty the ductile elements of a child's mind,—that sublime creation over which angels bend in silent wonder?' 'Choose,' he added, 'the wisest and the best; and give her the place of honor in your household.' There is force in that view of the question, Madeline,—great force; and our sad experience with Mrs. Jeckyl should be felt as a solemn warning. If menials and inferiors are to be instructors of our children, will they not deprave their tastes instead of elevating them? Can an impure fountain send forth sweet waters? We cannot gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles."

Mrs. Dainty sat with her eyes cast down, and a thoughtful, sober expression on her face.

"For the sake of our children," she said, looking up, after the lapse of some moments, "I ought to be willing to do almost any thing. But this is a hard requirement."

"I do not believe," answered Mr. Dainty, "that Miss Harper will ever intrude herself offensively upon us. In no instance since she has been in our

house have I observed the slightest tendency in that direction.”

“I have had better opportunities for observation,” was the reply, “and read her deportment somewhat differently. Why, if she were to the very manor born, she could not bear herself with greater ease nor show a higher self-possession. There is the tone and carriage about her of one who acknowledges no superior. It is this in the girl that has always annoyed me.”

“You may have looked through a distorting medium,” said Mr. Dainty.

“It is possible,” was answered, in a subdued voice. And then another long silence followed. It was broken in upon by the entrance of Agnes, their oldest daughter. She pushed the door open quietly, and, seeing her father and mother alone, was about retiring, when the former said,—

“Come in, daughter.”

“I only wanted a book,” remarked Agnes.

“Come and sit down here. I have something to say to you about Miss Harper,” added Mr. Dainty.

Agnes looked curiously at her father.

“What about Miss Harper?” she asked, as she drew a chair to his side.

“You like her?” Mr. Dainty spoke in a tone of inquiry.

“Oh, yes, father.” The answer was warmly uttered.

“Why?”

“Because she is kind and good.”

“Do you wish her to remain here?”

“I wouldn’t have her go away for all the world!” said Agnes, speaking with strong emphasis.

“Why not?”

“What would become of Madeline?” was the earnestly-spoken inquiry.

“Of Madeline?” Both Mr. and Mrs. Dainty looked with surprise at Agnes.

“Yes: that dreadful woman would get her again. Maddy would steal off, as she did before. Oh, father, don’t let Miss Harper go away! she’s the only one who can get along with sister now. She is so wise, so good, so loving, and so patient. I looked at her a little while ago, as she sat reading in the Bible to Madeline, and thought her face shone like that of an angel. I wished then that she were my sister, instead of only our governess. Dear father, I think Miss Harper must have been born a true lady.”

“Agnes,” said Mr. Dainty, after musing for some moments, “Uncle John knew her mother.”

“Did he?” The face of Agnes brightened.

“Yes: he knew her a great many years ago.”

“Then he had seen Miss Harper before she came here?”

“Yes; and it was because he had faith in her goodness and intelligence that he was so desirous to have her remain as your governess. We had no knowledge of all this when she came here, but he told us about it this evening. And now she is going to be one of us; that is, she will be as our daughter and your elder sister.”

“How glad I am! how glad I am!” exclaimed Agnes, striking her hands together, while tears filled her eyes. “But, mother, you don’t say any thing!” And she stood up and looked earnestly into her mother’s face.

“Can you accept her as an equal?” asked Mrs. Dainty, almost coldly.

“She is wiser and better than I am,” replied Agnes, humbly. “If she will accept me as a sister, my heart will yield to her joyfully. Dear mother, take her into favor and love, for she is worthy.”

“Leave us now, daughter,” said Mrs. Dainty, in a softened voice. “We will talk about this another time.”

And Agnes, after kissing her mother affectionately, withdrew from the library.

“The thing is inevitable.” Mrs. Dainty was not by any means reconciled, as both tone and manner indicated.

“But easy.”

“Easy?”

“Yes, and may be accepted gracefully. Let us be thankful that Miss Harper is not a proud, selfish, designing girl, whose first effort would be to produce alienation between us and Mr. Fleetwood.”

The thoughts of Mrs. Dainty reverted at once to the insolent manner in which she had conducted herself toward Miss Harper, and her efforts to degrade her in the family; and a wave of apprehension swept across her selfish heart.

“But,” continued Mr. Dainty, “of this I do not imagine there is any thing to fear. Miss Harper I regard as above suspicion. There is no doubt of her being able to influence your uncle against us if she should be so inclined. Let us act wisely, and not produce in her that inclination. Madeline, you see as clearly as I do the doubtful position we now occupy. The tables are suddenly turned upon us, and we are to-day in the power of an obscure young girl upon whom we have looked down as the humble governess of our children. It is no use to strive against the inevitable. We must either accept or reject her. If the former, it will have to be done heartily. Neither coldness nor reserve will answer. Miss Harper is clear-seeing, sensitive, and high-spirited. Her relation to Mr. Fleetwood gives her a position of equality, and any attempt on your part to degrade her, in even the slightest thing, will be felt and resented by both.”

“I see; I see,” answered Mrs. Dainty, moodily. “But, when a thing has to be done, only fools hesitate. I will discipline my feelings to-night, and to-morrow put on toward this usurping girl a new exterior. Don’t fear but that I shall play my part.”

“It may cost you a struggle,” said her husband, “but the strife will soon be over. I hope much from her gentle nature, and much from her clear perception of right. She will not, I am sure, take a mean advantage of this great diversion in her favor.”

“Time will show,” was the almost sullen response.

CHAPTER XXVII. GETTING RIGHT.

No word of caution had been spoken in the ears of Agnes by either her father or her mother; and so, with a heart full of joy at the news she had heard, she ran to the chamber where Florence was alone with Madeline, and, throwing her arms around her neck, kissed her, and said,—

“Dear sister! Dear sister!”

Florence returned the embrace, and kissed Agnes tenderly.

“Dear sister!” murmured the excited girl, again pressing her lips to the cheek of Miss Harper.

“I am your true friend, Agnes,” said the young governess, calmly—“your true and loving friend.”

“Be nearer than a friend; even as a sister. Father says that now you are to be as a daughter in the house. Uncle John has told him all. Oh, I am so glad! so glad!”

The face of Miss Harper grew pale, and she sat very still for some moments.

“Maybe I shouldn’t have told you,” said Agnes, looking concerned. “But my heart was so full I could not help it.”

“Where is your mother?” asked Florence, after a pause.

“In the library, with father,” replied Agnes.

“Will you remain for a little while with Madeline? I wish to see your mother. You will stay with your sister, dear, until I come back?” And she stooped over Madeline.

“You won’t stay long, will you?”

“No. I will return soon.” And she arose and left the chamber.

Since the remark of Mrs. Dainty, with which the preceding chapter closed, no words had passed between her and her husband. They were still sitting in the library, when the door was pushed quietly open, and the subject of their recent conversation entered. A glance at her almost pale face showed that her feelings were strongly agitated. Her manner, as she crossed the room toward Mrs. Dainty, was subdued and respectful. The latter rose as Florence approached her. The struggle with herself was powerful, but brief. Suddenly her cold face was broken by rippling smiles, and, with a warmth of tone and manner that was remarkable, considering the real state of her feelings, she said, grasping the young girl’s hand, and kissing her,—

“We have heard all, dear Miss Harper, and take you to our home and hearts. Be to us as a daughter, and to our children, who love you, as an elder sister.”

“Welcome! Thrice welcome!” said Mr. Dainty, offering his hand.

Florence was so much overcome by this unexpected reception that she was unable to reply. Her face remained pale and strongly agitated. Before self-control was regained, Mr. Fleetwood entered the library.

“See, Uncle John,” cried Mrs. Dainty; “we have already taken this dear, good girl into our love and confidence. She shall be as our daughter.”

Mr. Fleetwood was taken by surprise. He stood still for a moment or two, half bewildered. Then, comprehending the scene, he advanced to Florence, and, drawing an arm around her, said, with much feeling,—

“The trial is over, dear child! There are no more rough paths for your tender feet.”

And he pressed his lips against her pure forehead. She could bear up under the weight of emotion no longer. Sobs convulsed her, and, as tears poured over her cheeks, she hid her face upon the old man’s breast and wept passionately. Even the worldly, calculating heart of Mrs. Dainty was touched, and Mr. Dainty drew his hand quickly across his eyes to dash away the blinding drops.

“I promised Madeline to return very soon.” Florence was the first to gain entire self-control. She spoke in a low but steady voice, as she looked up. “And now I must go back to her. I need not say that my heart is deeply touched by this unexpected occurrence. You offer more than I have any right to claim,—more than I desire. Let me still be to your children as in the beginning. I came as their teacher; I have learned to love them; I am sure that I can do them good.”

“The children’s teacher, and the mother’s friend!” said Mrs. Dainty, whose feelings were taking a higher tone. She saw herself in the right path, although by constraint, and felt that the way before her was easier to walk in than she had dared to hope.

“Yes,—the mother’s friend,” Mr. Fleetwood spoke slowly and with emphasis; “for none else is worthy to be the children’s instructor, companion, and guide.”

While he was yet speaking, Florence retired from the room.

“You have done well, Madeline,” added Mr. Fleetwood, as the door closed on Florence, “and better a great deal than I had reason to expect. In bending down to one like Miss Harper, and raising her up to the social level you occupy, there is no loss on your part, while the sphere of life in which you move gains largely by an accession of virtue, intelligence, refined taste, and womanly self-reliance. Depend upon it, Madeline, the benefit is largely in your favor. Florence will give more of good than she receives.”

“She is certainly a remarkable girl,” said Mr. Dainty. “In our late trouble she exhibited qualities that now excite my admiration. If our dear lost child had been her own sister, she could not have pursued the search with greater assiduity. We owe her more than we can ever repay.”

“And there is a work,” replied Mr. Fleetwood, speaking in a tone of unusual seriousness, “which, if she have the wisdom to execute, will lay us under still higher obligations.”

Uncle John paused. Mr. and Mrs. Dainty looked at him inquiringly.

“Maddy is changed.”

He paused again,—then added,—

“And there is a fearful mystery connected with the change. We trace its beginning from the hour that demon in human guise entered our home, and let the glare of her evil eye fall upon the child. She gained, by some infernal art, control over the will of that child, and led her off a captive, powerless to resist. Thank God, we have rescued her, so far as the body is concerned. But the thralldom went far below the visible and the external. There is yet a spell upon her life,—a spell that must be broken; and I have no hope, except in Florence Harper!”

A shadow of fear settled on the face of Mrs. Dainty.

“It is wonderful,” continued Uncle John, “with what wise caution Miss Harper is already acting toward Maddy. Would you believe it? the child not only refused to let Florence read to her from the Bible, but actually sought to destroy the book! And yet the good girl was not turned aside from her holy purpose, but lured the perverse one into the right way. In the end, Maddy listened with deep interest while Florence read of the Saviour’s birth. Wise, loving, true-hearted girl! She is the angel in our house, Madeline! Fail not to honor the heavenly guest. She has begun right; let us give her all possible aid, so that the angel may triumph over the demon.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

On the next day Adele Weir was taken by Mr. Fleetwood and Florence to the house of Mrs. Elder. The good lady, when she clearly understood the case, and read something of the girl's character and state of mind, did not hesitate about receiving her, and Adele accepted the proffered home and refuge with tearful gratitude.

Mr. Fleetwood and Florence returned together. As they drew near the house of Mr. Dainty, they saw a woman ascend the steps and ring the bell. Before they came up, the door was opened and the woman entered.

"Who is that?" asked Mr. Fleetwood.

"If my eyes do not deceive me," was the reply of Florence, "it is the mother of Adele Weir."

"No! she would hardly dare venture here."

"A mother will dare much for her child," said Florence.

They moved forward quickly, and were soon at the door.

"Who came in just now?" inquired Miss Harper, in a low voice.

The waiter shook his head as he answered, "Don't know, miss."

"What name did she give?"

"She asked for Mrs. Dainty, but would not send up her name."

"Let us go into the parlor," said Mr. Fleetwood, in a whisper to Florence. Florence looked assent, and the two passed in. A woman closely veiled sat on one of the sofas.

"Mrs. Weir!" said Florence, speaking with blended surprise and indignation in the tones of her voice. The veil was drawn aside, revealing

the pale face and glittering black eyes of Adele's mother. Her thin lips were firmly set, and the expression of the woman's countenance was resolute.

"I have come for my child!" she said, in a voice that betrayed much agitation of mind.

"She is not here," Florence replied.

"She was brought here," said the woman, fixing her piercing eyes upon the face of Miss Harper.

"She came here to restore to her mother the child a wicked woman enticed away, and you secreted, making yourself thereby a party to the crime."

"And is here now?" said Mrs. Weir.

"No, she is not here," answered Florence. "I said that once before."

"Then where is she?"

Florence turned to Mr. Fleetwood, and the old gentleman promptly took her place.

"Beyond the reach of your blighting influence, madam," said he, in his decided way, "and, I trust, forever beyond."

"Sir, I will not be robbed of my child!" And the woman started to her feet, exhibiting not only strong excitement, but a determined spirit.

"Your child has fled from you in fear," said Mr. Fleetwood, assuming a calmer voice, "and is now, I trust for her sake, entirely beyond your influence. She has made her election, and, so long as she continues in her present mind, will have friends to guide and protect her. And now, madam, let me warn you, in the beginning, against any attempts to annoy this family. Your daughter is not here, and therefore all search for her in this direction will be fruitless. If you come here again you will be handed over to the law. And I am not sure that we shall let you escape as it is. The part you have taken in the concealment of the child stolen from this house makes you an accomplice in the crime,—you and the man Dyer also."

At the name of Dyer the woman started in surprise, and a shade of alarm came over her pale face.

“Mr. Dyer has nothing to do with the affairs of my house,” she said, quickly.

“He is known to have been a party in this wicked transaction.” Mr. Fleetwood spoke sternly and positively. “And I shall get the police on his track.”

Mrs. Weir manifested still greater disturbance, which encouraged the old gentleman to continue the assault in that direction.

“See to it, then, both of you!” he continued. “Such things are not to be done in the broad day and passed over as of light account. You will all of you find, before you are done with this nefarious business, that you have gone a step too far. Mrs. Jeckyl has escaped us; but some one must answer to outraged justice. Florence!” Mr. Fleetwood turned quickly to Miss Harper and said, “Tell the waiter that I wish to see him,” adding, in a lower key, “it will hardly do to let this woman escape.”

The closing words reached the ears for which they were really intended, and Mrs. Weir, as Florence turned to leave the parlor, moved toward the door leading into the passage.

“Stay,” said Mr. Fleetwood, speaking to Mrs. Weir. “Don’t go yet!”

If he had said “Go,” instead, she could not have shown a greater willingness to depart.

“John!” Mr. Fleetwood called for the waiter, in a loud, imperative voice.

That was enough. Mrs. Weir’s alarm was complete, and she fled precipitately from the house.

A few days afterward Mr. Fleetwood visited the neighborhood in which she had lived, but found her house vacant, and “To Let” on the door.

The task before Miss Harper was no light one. It required more than a single victory over the evil spirits who had gained, through disorderly rites, power in the child’s mind, to dispossess them. Scarcely a day passed in

which Madeline did not relapse into moody states or show a strangely perverse will. Patience, gentleness, loving-kindness, all were brought into exercise; and sometimes the contest would be long and painful. But always the angel proved stronger than the demon, and the tried spirit of the child arose, through divine aid, superior to its foes.

As weeks and months glided onward, the old tranquil states returned, and the gentlest and sweetest of all the children was restored to herself again,—stood clothed and in her right mind. Mrs. Dainty, from whose eyes the veil had fallen, now saw the character of Florence in its true light. There had been no intrusions upon her selfish pride, no humiliating concessions required. A quiet dignity and gentle reserve had marked the conduct of Miss Harper from the hour their new relation began. Instead of having to throw up barriers against the too familiar approaches of an unwelcome inmate, Mrs. Dainty soon found that she must court, if she would have, equal intercourse.

With an easy grace and unobtrusive self-possession, Miss Harper took her place as one of the family. Before a year had passed, even Mrs. Dainty had learned to confide in her discretion, to defer to her judgment in all things relating to the children, and to regard her as a true friend. Mr. Fleetwood looked on, a happier man than he had been for many years. No tenderer love for a daughter was ever born in a father's heart than that which he felt for the child of his adoption. And he was very proud of her. As she gradually passed into the refined and intelligent circles that opened spontaneously to receive her, and there became an object of unconscious attraction, the old man looked on with a swelling heart, while admiration blended with love and pride. And yet he loved her best of all for the daily duties through which she passed with such an earnest self-devotion. He saw the children of his weak, vain, worldly-minded niece growing daily more and more like their guide, companion, and friend. He had loved them from the beginning for their childish innocence and affection, but love took now a deeper tone, and gathered strength and emotion from the beauty of goodness that daily blossomed in their lives, the sweet presage of fruit in sunny autumn.

Of Mrs. Jeckyl no more was seen or heard. She vanished like an evil spirit when the sun-rays of truth stream down through the rifted clouds of

error. The shadow of her presence had left a blight on the earth; but warm sunshine and gentle dews made the soil fruitful again, and good seeds, planted by careful hands, soon shot up the tender blade and covered the desert place with greenness. Mrs. Weir came not again. The warning of consequences had thoroughly alarmed her, and Adele was permitted to remain under the wise, religious care of Mrs. Elder. Very deeply had her young life been disturbed by the disorderly influences to which she had been subjected in her mother's house; and there were times when the evil spirits who had gained access to her mind found some of the old avenues unguarded, and flowed in with their sphere of error, invading even the outer citadel of natural and corporeal life. But Mrs. Elder knew wherein lay the power of exorcism. She knew that as she filled the mind of Adele full, as it were, of the precepts and narratives of the Divine Word which was "in the beginning," which was "with God," and which "was God," she would succeed in casting out the spirits who sought to rule her, and set her freed soul upon the Rock of Eternal Ages. She did not labor in vain.

And so good triumphed. The Angel was stronger than the Demon. The human souls that came forth from God, with God-given freedom of will, were restored to the orderly life into which they were created, free, as reason developed, to select, unbiassed by the intrusion of disorderly spiritual spheres, the paths of life in which they would move through the world. Without such rational freedom, spiritual regeneration is impossible; and any thing that disturbs such freedom cannot have its origin in heaven. So we read the doctrine of life; and, so reading it, we teach.

THE END.

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