

# **The House of the White Shadows**

**Vol.II**

**By**

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***Free*editorial** 

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## **CHAPTER I A LETTER FROM JOHN VANBRUGH**

For a little while Gautran scarcely comprehended that he was at liberty to wander forth. He had so completely given himself up as lost that he was stupefied by the announcement that his liberty was restored to him. He gazed vacantly before him, and the announcement had to be twice repeated before he arrived at an understanding of its purport; then his attitude changed. A spasm of joy passed into his face, followed immediately by a spasm of fear; those who observed him would indeed have been amazed had they known what was passing through his mind.

"Free, am I?" he asked.

"You have been told so twice," a warder answered. "It astonishes you. Well, you are not the only one."

As the warders fell from his side he watched them warily, fearing they were setting a trap which might prove his destruction.

From where he stood he could not see the Advocate, who was preparing to depart. Distasteful as the verdict was to every person in court, with the exception of Gautran and his counsel, those members of the legal profession who had not taken an active part in the trial were filled with professional admiration at the skill the Advocate had displayed. An eminent member of the bar remarked to him:

"It is a veritable triumph, the greatest and most surprising I have ever witnessed. None but yourself could have accomplished it. Yet I cannot believe in the man's innocence."

This lawyer held too high and honourable a position for the Advocate to remain silent. "The man is innocent," he said.

"You know him to be so?"

"I know him to be so. I stake my reputation upon it."

"You almost convince me. It would be fatal to any reputation were Gautran, after what has passed, to be proved guilty. But that, of course, is impossible."

"Quite impossible," said the Advocate somewhat haughtily.

"Exactly so. There can be no room for doubt, after your statement that you know the man to be innocent."

With no wish to continue the conversation, the Advocate turned to leave the court when an officer presented himself.

"He wishes to speak to you, sir."

"He! Who?" asked the Advocate. He was impatient to be gone, his interest at the trial being at an end. The victory was gained; there was nothing more to be done.

"The prisoner, sir. He desired me to tell you."

"The prisoner!" said the Advocate. "You forget. The man is free."

He walked towards Gautran, and for the first time during the long days of the trial gazed directly in his client's face. The magnetism in the Advocate's eyes arrested Gautran's speech. His own dilated, and he appeared to forget what he had intended to say. They looked at each other in silence for a few moments, the expression on the face of the Advocate cold, keen, and searching, that on the face of Gautran as of a man entranced; and then the Advocate turned sternly away, without a word having been spoken between them. When Gautran looked again for his defender he was gone.

Gautran still lingered; the court was nearly empty.

"Be off," said the warder, who had been his chief attendant in his cell; "we have done with you for the present."

But Gautran made no effort to leave. The warder laid his hand upon the ruffian's shoulder, with the intention of expelling him from the court.

Gautran shook him off with the snarl of a wild beast.

"Touch me again," he cried, "and I'll strangle you! I can do it easily enough two of you at a time!"

And, indeed, so ferocious was his manner that it seemed as if he were disposed to carry his threat into execution.

"Women are more in your way," said the warder tauntingly. "Look you, Gautran; if Madeline had been my daughter, your life would not be worth an hour's purchase, despite the verdict gained by your clever Advocate."

"You would not dare to say that to me if you and I were alone," retorted Gautran, scowling at the sullen faces of the officers about him.

"Away with you!" exclaimed the warder, "at once, or we will throw you into the streets!"

"I will go when I get my property."

"What property?"

"The knife you took from me when you dragged me to prison. I don't move without it."

They deemed it best to comply with this demand, the right being on his side, and his knife was restored to him. It was an old knife, with a keen blade and a stout handle, and it opened and closed with a sharp click. Gautran tried it three or four times with savage satisfaction and then, with another interchange of threatening glances, he slunk from the court.

The Advocate's carriage was at the door, ready to convey him to Christian Almer's villa. But after his long confinement in the close court, he felt the need of physical exercise, and he dismissed his coachman, saying he intended to walk home. As the carriage drove off, a person plucked him by the sleeve, and pressed a letter into his hand. It was dusk, and the Advocate, although he looked quickly around, could not discover the giver. His sight was short and strong, and standing beneath the light of a streetlamp he opened and read the letter.

"Old Friend,

"It will doubtless surprise you to see my handwriting, it is so long since we met. The sight of it may displease you, but that is of small consequence to me. When a man is in a desperate strait, he is occasionally driven to desperate courses. When needs must, as you are aware, the devil drives. I have been but an hour in Geneva, and I have heard of your victory; I congratulate you upon it. I must see you soon. I know the House of White Shadows in the pretty valley yonder. At a short distance from the gates but far enough off, and so situated as to enable a man to hide with safety if he desires a hill upon which I will wait for your signal to come to you, which shall be the waving of a white

handkerchief from your study window. At midnight and alone will be best. You see how ready I am to oblige you. I shall wait till sunrise for the signal. If you are too busy tonight, let it be tomorrow night, or the next, or any night this week.

"I am, as ever, your friend,

"John Vanbrugh."

The Advocate placed the letter in his pocket, and murmured as he walked through the streets of Geneva:

"John Vanbrugh! Has he risen from his grave? He would see me at midnight and alone! He must be mad, or drunk, to make such a request. He may keep his vigil, undisturbed. Of such a friendship there can be no renewal. The gulf that separates us is too wide to be bridged over by sentimental memories. John Vanbrugh, the vagabond! I can imagine him, and the depth to which he has sunk. Every man must bear the consequences of his actions. Let him bear his, and make the best, or the worst, of them."

## CHAPTER II

### A STARTLING INTERRUPTION

The news of the acquittal of Gautran spread swiftly through the town, and the people gathered in front of the cafés and lingered in the streets, to gaze upon the celebrated Advocate who had worked the marvel.

"He has a face like the Sphynx," said one.

"With just as much feeling," said another.

"Do you believe Gautran was innocent?"

"Not I though he made it appear so."

"Neither do I believe it, but I confess I am puzzled."

"If Gautran did not murder the girl, who did?" asked one, a waverer, who formed an exception to the general rule.

"That is for the law to find out."

"It was found out, and the murderer has been set loose. We shall have to take care of ourselves on dark nights."

"Would you condemn a man upon insufficient evidence?"

"I would condemn such as Gautran on any evidence. When you want to get rid of vermin it does not do to be over particular."

"The law must be respected."

"Life must be protected. That is the first law."

"Hush! Here he is. Best not let him overhear you."

There was but little diversity of opinion. Even in the inn of The Seven Liars, to which Fritz the Fool who had attended the court every day of the trial, and who had the fleetest foot of any man for a dozen miles round had already conveyed the news of Gautran's

acquittal, the discussion was loud and animated; the women regarding the result as an outrage on their sex, the men more disposed to put Gautran out of the question, and to throw upon the Advocate the opprobrium of the verdict.

"Did I not tell you," said Fritz, "that he could turn black into white? A great mana great man! If we had more like him, murdering would be a fine trade."

There were, doubtless, among those who thronged the streets to see the Advocate pass, some sinners whose consciences tormented them, and who secretly hoped, if exposure ever overtook them, that Heaven would send them such a defender. His reception, indeed, partook of the character of an ovation. These tributes to his powers made no impression upon him; he pursued his way steadily onward, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and soon the gailylighted shops and cafés of Geneva were far behind him.

His thoughts were upon John Vanbrugh, who had been one of his boy friends, and whom for many years he had believed to be dead. In his lonely walk to the House of White Shadows he recalled the image of Vanbrugh, and dwelt, with idle curiosity, upon the recollection of their youthful lives. He had determined not to see Vanbrugh, and was resolved not to renew a friendship which, during its existence, had been lacking in those sterling qualities necessary for endurance. That it was pleasant while it lasted was the best that could be said of it. When he and Vanbrugh grew to manhood there was a wide divergence in their paths.

One walked with firm unfaltering step the road which leads to honour and renown, sparing no labour, throwing aside seductive temptation when it presented itself to him, as it did in its most alluring forms, giving all his mental might to the cause to which he had devoted himself, studying by day and night so earnestly that his bright and strong intellect became stronger and clearer, and he could scarcely miss success. Only once in his younger days had he allowed himself, for a brief period, to be seduced from this path, and it was John Vanbrugh who had tempted him.

The other threw himself upon pleasure's tide, and, blind to earnest duty, drank the sunshine of life's springtime in draughts so intemperate that he became intoxicated with poisonous fire, and, falling into the arms of the knaves who thrive on human weakness and depravity, his moral sense, like theirs, grew warped, and he ripened into a knave himself.

Something of this, but not in its fulness, had reached the Advocate's ears, making but small impression upon him, and exciting no surprise, for by that time his judgment was matured, and human character was an open book to him; and when, some little while

afterwards, he heard that John Vanbrugh was dead, he said, "He is better dead," and scarcely gave his once friend another thought.

He was a man who had no pity for the weak, and no forgiveness for the erring.

He walked slowly, with a calm enjoyment of the solitude and the quiet night, and presently entered a narrow lane, dotted with orchards.

It was now dark, and he could not see a dozen yards before him. He was fond of darkness; it contained mysterious possibilities, he had been heard to say. There was an ineffable charm in the stillness which encompassed him, and he enjoyed it to its full. There were cottages here and there, lying back from the road, but no light or movement in them; the inmates were asleep. Soft sighs proceeded from the drowsy trees, and slender boughs waved solemnly, while the only sounds from the farmyards were, at intervals, a muffled shaking of wings, and the barking of dogs whom his footsteps had aroused. As he passed a high wooden gate, through the bars of which he could dimly discern a line of tall trees standing like sentinels of the night, the perfume of limes was wafted towards him, and he softly breathed the words:

"My wife!"

He yielded up his senses to the thralldom of a delicious languor, in which the only image was that of the fair and beautiful woman who was waiting for him in their holiday home. Had any person seen the tender light in his eyes, and heard the tone in which the words were whispered, he could not have doubted that the woman they referred to was passionately adored.

Not for long was he permitted to muse upon the image of a being the thought of whom appeared to transform a passionless man into an ardent lover; a harsher interruption than sweet perfume floating on a breeze recalled him to his sterner self.

"Stop!"

"For what reason?"

"The best. Money!"

The summons proceeded from one in whom, as his voice betrayed, the worst passions were dominant.



### **CHAPTER III**

#### **IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT**

There lived not in the world a man more fearless than the Advocate. At this threatening demand, which meant violence, perhaps murder, he exhibited as little trepidation as he would have done at an acquaintance asking him, in broad daylight, for a pinch of snuff. Indeed, he was so perfectly unembarrassed that his voice assumed a lightness foreign to its usual serious tones. "Money, my friend! How much?"

"All you've got."

"Terse, and to the point. If I refuse?"

"I am desperate. Look to yourself."

The Advocate smiled, and purposely deepened the airiness of his tones.

"This is a serious business, then?"

"You'll find it so, if you trifle with me."

"Are you hungry?"

"I am starving."

"You have a powerful voice for a starving man."

"Don't play with me, master. I mean to have what I ask for."

"How can you, if I do not possess it? How will you if, possessing it, I refuse to give it you?"

The reply was a crashing blow at an overhanging branch, which broke it to the ground. It was evident that the man carried a stout weapon, and that he meant to use it, with murderous effect, if driven to extremes. They spoke at arm'slength; neither was quite within the other's grasp.

"A strong argument," said the Advocate, without blenching, "and a savage one. You have a staff in your hand, and, probably, a knife in your pocket."

"Ah, I have, and a sharp blade to it."

"I thought as much. Would not that do your business more effectually?"

"Perhaps. But I've learnt a lesson today about knives, which teaches me not to use mine too freely."

The Advocate frowned.

"Other scoundrels would run less risk of the gaol if their proceeding's were as logical. Do you know me?"

"How should I?"

"It might be, then," continued the Advocate, secretly taking a box of matches from his pocket, "that, like yourself, I am both a thief and a wouldbe murderer."

As he uttered the last words he flung a lighted match straight at the man's face, and for a moment the glare revealed the ruffian's features. He staggered back, repeating the word "Murderer!" in a hoarse startled whisper. The Advocate strode swiftly to his side, and striking another match, held it up to his own face.

"Look at me, Gautran," he said.

The man looked up, and recognising the Advocate, recoiled, muttering:

"Aye, ayeI see who it is."

"And you would rob me, wretch!"

"Not now, master, not now. Your voiceit was the voice of another man. I crave your pardon, humbly."

"Soyou recommence work early, Gautran. Have you not had enough of the gaol?"

"More than enough. Don't be hard on me, master; call me mad if you like."

"Mad or sane, Gautran, every man is properly made accountable for his acts. Take this to heart."

"It won't do me any good. What is a poor wretch to do with nothing but empty pockets?"

"You are a dullwitted knave, or you would be aware it is useless to lie to me. Gautran, I can read your soul. You wished to speak to me in the court. Here is your opportunity. Say what you had to say."

"Give me breathing time. You've the knack of driving the thoughts clean out of a man's head. Have you got a bit of something that a poor fellow can chew the end of a cigar, or a nip of tobacco?"

"I have nothing about me but money, which you can't chew, and should not have if you could. Hearken, my friend. When you said you were starving, you lied to me."

"How do you know it?"

"Fool! Are there not fruit trees here, laden with wholesome food, within any thief's grasp? Your pockets at this moment are filled with fruit."

"You have a gift," said Gautran with a cringing movement of his body. "It would be an act of charity to put me in the way of it."

"What would you purchase?" asked the advocate ironically. "Gold, for wine, and pleasure, and fine clothes?"

"Aye, master," replied Gautran with eager voice.

"Power, to crush those you hate, and make them smart and bleed?"

"Aye, master. That would be fine."

"Gautran, these things are precious, and have their price. What are you ready to pay for them?"

"Anything anything but money!"

"Something of less worth your soul?"

Gautran shuddered and crossed himself.

"No, no," he muttered; "not that not that!"

"Strange," said the Advocate with a contemptuous smile, "the value we place upon an unknown quantity! We cannot bargain, friend. Say now what you desire to say, and as briefly as you can."

But it was some time before Gautran could sufficiently recover himself to speak with composure.

"I want to know," he said at length, with a clicking in his throat, "whether you've been paid for what you did for me?"

"At your trial?"

"Aye, master."

"I have not been paid for what I did for you."

"When they told me yonder," said Gautran after another pause, pointing in the direction of Geneva, where the prison lay, "that you were to appear for me, they asked me how I managed it, but I couldn't tell them, and I'm beating my head now to find out, without getting any nearer to it. There must be a reason."

"You strike a keynote, my friend."

"Someone has promised to pay you."

"No one has promised to pay me."

"You puzzle and confuse me, master. You're a stranger in Geneva, I'm told."

"It is true."

"I've lived about here half my life. I was born in Sierre. My father worked in the foundry, my mother in the fields. You are not a stranger in Sierre."

"I am a stranger there; I never visited the town."

"My father was born in Martigny. You knew my father."

"I did not know your father."

"My motherher father once owned a vineyard. You knew her."

"I did not know her."

Once more was Gautran silent. What he desired now to say raised up images so terrifying that he had not the courage to give it utterance.

"You are in deep shadow, my friend," said the Advocate, "body and soul. Shall I tell you what is in your mind?"

"You can do that?"

"You wish to know if I was acquainted with the unhappy girl with whose murder you were charged."

"Is there another in the world like you?" asked Gautran, with fear in his voice. "Yes, that is what I want to know."

"I was not acquainted with her."

Gautran retreated a step or two, in positive terror. "Then what," he exclaimed, "in the fiend's name made you come forward?"

"At length," said the Advocate, "we arrive at an interesting point in our conversation. I thank you for the opportunity you afford me in questioning my inner self. What made me come forward to the assistance of such a scoundrel? Humanity? No. Sympathy? No. What, then, was my motive? Indeed, friend, you strike home. Shall I say I was prompted by a desire to assist the course of justice or by a contemptible feeling of vanity to engage in a contest for the simple purpose of proving myself the victor? It was something of both, mayhap. Do you know, Gautran, a kind of self-despise stirs within me at the present moment? You do not understand me? I will give you a close illustration. You are a thief."

"Yes, master."

"You steal sometimes from habit, to keep your hand in as it were, and you feel a certain satisfaction at having accomplished your theft in a workmanlike manner. We are all of us but gross and earthly patches. It is simply a question of degree, and it is because I am in an idle mood indeed, I am grateful to you for this playful hour that I make a confession to you which would not elevate me in the eyes of better men. You were anxious to know whether I have been paid for my services. I now acknowledge payment. I accept as my fee the recreation you have afforded me."

"I shall be obliged to you, master," said Gautran, "if you will leave your mysteries, and come back to my trial."

"I will oblige you. I read the particulars of the case for the first time on my arrival here, and it appeared to me almost impossible you could escape conviction. It was simply that. I examined you, and saw the legal point which, villain as you are, proclaimed your innocence. That laugh of yours, Gautran, has no mirth in it. I am beginning to be dangerously shaken. I will do, I said then, for this wretch what I believe no other man can do. I will perform a miracle."

"You have done it!" cried Gautran, falling on his knees in a paroxysm of fear, and kissing the Advocate's hand, which was instantly snatched away. "You are great you are the greatest! You knew the truth!"

"The truth!" echoed the Advocate, and his face grew ashen white.

"Aye, the truth and you were sent to save me. You can read the soul; nothing is hidden from you. But you have not finished your work. You can save me entirely you can, you can! Oh, master, finish your work, and I will be your slave to the last hour of my life!"

"Save you! From what?" demanded the Advocate. He was compelled to exercise great control over himself, for a horror was stealing upon him.

The trembling wretch rose, and pointed to the opposite roadside.

"From shadows from dreams from the wild eyes of Madeline! Look there look there!"

The Advocate turned in the direction of Gautran's outstretched trembling hand. A pale light was coming into the sky, and weird shadows were on the earth.

"What are you gazing on?"

"You ask me to torture me," moaned Gautran. "She dogs me like my shadow I cannot shake her off! I have threatened her, but she does not heed me. She is waiting there to follow me when I am alone to put her arms about me to breathe upon my face, and turn my heart to ice! If I could hold her, I would tear her piecemeal! You must have known her, you who can read what passes in a man's soul you who knew the truth when you came to me in my cell! She will not obey me, but she will you. Command her, compel her to leave me, or she will drive me mad!"

With amazing strength the Advocate placed his hands on Gautran's shoulders, and twisted the man's face so close to his own that not an inch of space divided them. Their eyes met, Gautran's wavering and dilating with fear, the Advocate's fixed and stern, and with a fire in them terrible to behold.

"Recall," said the Advocate, in a clear voice that rang through the night like a bell, "what passed between you and Madeline on the last night of her life. Speak!"

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CONFESSION

"I sought her in the Quartier St. Gervais," said I Gautran, speaking like a man in a dream, "and found her at eight o'clock in the company of a man. I watched them, and kept out of their sight.

"He was speaking to her softly, and some things he said to her made her smile; and every time she showed her white teeth I swore that she should be mine and mine alone. They remained together for an hour, and then they parted, he going one way, Madeline another.

"I followed her along the banks of the river, and when no one was near us I spoke to her. She was not pleased with my company, and bade me leave her, but I replied that I had something particular to say to her, and did not intend to go till it was spoken.

"It was a dark night; there was no moon.

"I told her I had been watching her, and that I knew she had another lover. 'Do you mean to give me up?' I said, and she answered that she had never accepted me, and that after that night she would never see me again. I said it might happen, and that it might be the last night we should ever see each other. She asked me if I was going away, and I said no, it might be her that was going away on the longest journey she had ever taken. 'What journey?' she asked, and I answered, a journey with Death for the coachman, for I had sworn a dozen times that night that if she would not swear upon her cross to be true and faithful to me, I would kill her.

"I said it twice, and some persons passed and turned to look at us, but there was not light enough to see us clearly.

"Madeline would have cried to them for help, but I held my hand over her mouth, and whispered that if she uttered a word it would be her last, and that she need not be frightened, for I loved her too well to do her any harm.

"But when we were alone again, and no soul was near us, I told her again that as sure as there was a sky above us I would kill her, unless she swore to give up her other lover, and be true to me. She said she would promise, and she put her little hand in mine and pressed it, and said:



"Gautran, I will be only yours; now let us go back.'

"But I told her it was not enough; that she must kneel, and swear upon the holy cross that she would have nothing to do with any man but me. I forced her upon her knees, and knelt by her side, and put the cross to her lips; and then she began to sob and tremble. She dared not put her soul in peril, she said; she did not love me how could she swear to be true to me?

"I said it was that or death, and that it would be the blackest hour of my life to kill her, but that I meant to do it if she would not give in to me. I asked her for the last time whether she would take the oath, and she said she daren't. Then I told her to say a prayer, for she had not five minutes to live. She started to her feet and ran along the bank. I ran after her, and she stumbled and fell to the ground, and before she could escape me again I had her in my arms to fling her into the river.

"She did not scratch or bite me, but clung to me, and her tears fell all about my face. I said to her:

"'You love me, kissing me so; swear then; it is not too late!'

"But she cried:

"No, no! I kiss you so that you may not have the heart to kill me!'

"Soon she got weak, and her arms had no power in them, and I lifted her high in the air, and flung her far from me into the river.

"I waited a minute or two, and thought she was dead, but then I heard a bubbling and a scratching, and, looking down, saw that by a miracle she had got back to the river's brink, and that there was yet life in her. I pulled her out, and she clung to me in a weak way, and whispered, nearly choked the while, that the Virgin Mary would not let me kill her.

"Will you take the oath?' I asked, and she shook her head from side to side.

"No! no! no!'

"I took my handkerchief, and tied it tight round her neck, and she smiled in my face. Then I lifted her up, and threw her into the river again.

"I saw her no more that night!"

The Advocate removed his eyes, with a shudder, from the eyes of the wretch who had made this horrible confession, and who now sank to the ground, quivering in every limb, crying:

"Save me, master, save me!"

"Monster!" exclaimed the Advocate. "Live and die accursed!"

But the terrorstricken man did not hear the words, and the Advocate, upon whose features, during Gautran's narration, a deep gloom had settled, strode swiftly from him through the peaceful narrow lane, fragrant with the perfume of limes, at the end of which the lights in the House of White Shadows were shining a welcome to him.

## CHAPTER V

### PREPARATIONS FOR A VISITOR

At noon the same day the old housekeeper, Mother Denise, and her pretty granddaughter Dionetta were busily employed setting in order and arranging the furniture in a suite of rooms intended for an expected visitor. There were but two floors in the House of White Shadows, and the rooms in which Mother Denise and Dionetta were busy were situated on the upper floor.

"I think they will do now," said Mother Denise, wiping imaginary dust away with her apron.

"All but the flowers." said Dionetta. "No, grandmother, that desk is wrong; it is my lady's own desk, and is to be placed exactly in this corner, by the window. There it is right now. Be sure that everything is in its proper place, and that the rooms are sweet and bright. Be sure! She has said that twenty times this week."

"Ah," said Mother Denise testily, "as if butterflies could teach bees how to work! My lady is turning your head, Dionetta, it is easy to see that; she has bewitched half the people in the village. Here is father, with the flowers. Haste, Martin, haste!"

"Easy to say, hard to do," grumbled Martin, entering slowly with a basket of cut flowers. "My bones get more obstinate every day. Here's my lady been teasing me out of my life to cut every flower worth looking at. She would have made the garden a wilderness, and spoilt every bed, if I had not argued with her."

"And what did she say," asked Mother Denise, "when you argued with her?"

"Say? Smiled, and showed all her white teeth at once. I never saw such teeth in my young days, nor such eyes, nor such hair, nor such hands enough to drive a young man crazy."

"Or an old one either," interrupted Mother Denise. "She smiled as sweet as honey you silly old man and wheedled you, and wheedled you, till she got what she wanted."

"Pretty well, pretty well. You see, Dionetta, there are two ways of getting a thing done, a soft way and a hard way."

"There, there, there!" cried Mother Denise impatiently. "Do your work with a still tongue, and let us do ours. Get back to the garden, and repair the mischief my lady has caused you to do. What does a man want with a room full of roses?" she muttered, when Martin, quick to obey his domestic tyrant, had gone.

"It is a welcome home," said Dionetta. "If I were absent from my place a long, long while, it would make me feel glad when I returned, to see my rooms as bright as this. It is as though the very roses remembered you."

"You are young," said Mother Denise, "and your thoughts go the way of roses. I can't blame you, Dionetta."

"It was ten years since the master was here, you have told me, grandmother."

"Yes, Dionetta, yes, ten years ago this summer, and even then he did not sleep in the house. Christian Almer hates the place, and of all the rooms in the villa, this is the room he would be most anxious to avoid."

"But why, grandmother?" asked Dionetta, her eyes growing larger and rounder with wonder; "and does my lady know it?"

"My lady is a headstrong woman; she would not listen to me when I advised her to select other rooms for the young master, and she declares in a light way to be sure, but these are not things to make light of that she is very disappointed to find that the villa is not haunted. Haunted! I have never seen anything, nor has Martin, nor you, Dionetta."

"Oh, grandmother!" said the girl, in a timid voice, "I don't know whether I have or not. Sometimes I have fancied"

"Of course you have fancied, and that is all; and you have woke up in the night, and been frightened by nothing. Mark me, Dionetta, if you do no wrong, and think no wrong, you will never see anything of the White Shadows of this house."

"I am certain," said Dionetta, more positively, "when I have been almost falling asleep, that I have heard them creeping, creeping past the door. I have listened to them over and over again, without daring to move in bed. Indeed I have."

"I am certain," retorted Mother Denise, "that you have heard nothing of the kind. You are a foolish, silly girl to speak of such things. You put me quite out of patience, child."

"But Fritz says"

"Fritz is a fool, a cunning, lazy fool. If I were the owner of this property I would pack him off. There's no telling which master he serves Christian Almer or Master Pierre Lamont. He likes his bread buttered on both sides, and accepts money from both gentlemen. That is not the conduct of a faithful servant. If I acted in such a manner I should consider myself disgraced."

"I am sure," murmured Dionetta, "that Fritz has done nothing to disgrace himself."

"Let those who are older than you," said Mother Denise, in a sharp tone, "be judges of that. Fritz is good for nothing but to chatter like a magpie and idle round the place from morning to night. When there's work to do, as there has been this week, carrying furniture and moving heavy things about, he must run away to the city, to the courthouse where that murderer is being tried. Dionetta, I am not in love with the Advocate or his lady. The Advocate is trying to get a murderer off; it may be the work of a clever man, but it is not the work of a good man. If I had a son, I would sooner have him good than clever; and I would sooner you married a good man than a clever one, I hope you are not thinking of marrying a fool."

"Oh, grandmother, whoever thinks of marrying?"

"Not you, of course, child would you have me believe that? When I was your age I thought of nothing else, and when you are my age you will see the folly of it. No, I am not in love with the Advocate. He is performing unholy work down there in Geneva. The priest says as much. If that murderer escapes from justice, the guilt of blood will weigh upon the Advocate's soul."

"Oh, grandmother! If my lady heard you she would never forgive you."

"If she hears it, it will not be from my tongue. Dionetta, it was a young girl who was murdered, about the same age as yourself. It might have been you ah, you may well turn white and this clever lawyer, this stranger it is, who comes among us to prevent justice being done upon a murderous wretch. He will be punished for it, mark my words."

Dionetta, who knew how useless it was to oppose her grandmother's opinions, endeavoured to change the subject by saying:

"Tell me, grandmother, why Mr. Almer should be more anxious to avoid this room than any other room in the house? I think it is the prettiest of all."

Mother Denise did not reply. She looked round her with the air of a woman recalling a picture of long ago.

"The story connected with this part of the house," she presently said, "gave to the villa the name of the House of White Shadows. You are old enough to hear it. Let me see, let me see. Christian Almer is now thirtyone years oldyes, thirtyone on his last birthday. How time passes! I remember well the day he was born"

"Hush, grandmother," said Dionetta, holding up her hand. "My lady."

The Advocate's wife had entered the room quietly, and was regarding the arrangements with approval.

"It is excellently done," she said, "exactly as I wished. Dionetta, it was you who arranged the flowers?"

"Yes, my lady."

"You have exquisite taste, really exquisite. Mother Denise, I am really obliged to you."

"I have done nothing," said Mother Denise, "that it was not my duty to do."

"Such an unpleasant way of putting it; for there is a way of doing things"

"Just what grandfather said," cried Dionetta, gleefully, "a hard way and a soft way." And then becoming suddenly aware of her rudeness in interrupting her mistress, she curtsied, and with a bright colour in her face, said, "I beg your pardon, my lady."

"There's no occasion, child," said Adelaide graciously. "Grandfather is quite right, and everything in this room has been done beautifully." She held a framed picture in her hand, a coloured cabinet photograph of herself, and she looked round the walls to find a place for it. "This will do," she said, and she took down the picture of a child which hung immediately above her desk, and put her own in its stead. "It is nice," she said to Mother Denise, smiling, "to see the faces of old friends about us. Mr. Almer and I are very old friends."

"The picture you have taken down," said Mother Denise, "is of Christian Almer when he was a child."

"Indeed! How old was he then?"

"Five years, my lady."

"He was a handsome boy. His hair and eyes are darker now. You were speaking of him, Mother Denise, as I entered. You were saying he was thirtyone last birthday, and that you remember the day he was born."

"Yes, my lady."

"And you were about to tell Dionetta why this villa was called the House of White Shadows. Give me the privilege of hearing the story."

"I would rather not relate it, my lady."

"Nonsense, nonsense! If Dionetta may hear it, there can be no objection to me. Mr. Almer would be quite angry if he knew you refused me so simple a thing. Listen to what he says in his last letter," and Adelaide took a letter from her pocket, and read: "'Mother Denise, the housekeeper, and the most faithful servant of the house, will do everything in her power to make you comfortable and happy. She will carry out your wishes to the letter tell her, if necessary, that it is my desire, and that she is to refuse you nothing.' Now, you dear old soul, are you satisfied?"

"Well, my lady, if you insist"

"Of course I insist, you dear creature. I am sure there is no one in the village who can tell a story half as well as you. Come and stand by me, Dionetta, for fear of ghosts."

She seated herself before the desk, upon which she laid the picture of the lad, and Mother Denise, who was really by no means loth to recall old reminiscences, and who, as she proceeded, derived great enjoyment herself from her narration, thus commenced:

## CHAPTER VI

### A LOVE STORY OF THE PAST

"I was born in this house, my lady; my mother was housekeeper here before me. I am sixtyeight years old, and I have never slept a night away from the villa; I hope to die here. Until your arrival the house has not been inhabited for more than twenty years. I dare say if Mr. Christian Almer, the present master, had the power to sell the estate, he would have done so long ago, but he is bound by his father's will not to dispose of it while he lives. So it has been left to our care all these years.

"Christian Almer's father lived here, and courted his young wife here; a very beautiful lady. That is her portrait hanging on the wall. It was painted by M. Gabriel, and is a faithful likeness of Mr. Christian Almer's mother. His father, perhaps he may have told you, was a distinguished author; there are books upon the library shelves written by him. I will speak of him, if you please, as Mr. Almer, and my present master I will call Master Christian; it will make the story easier to tell.

"When Mr. Almer came into his property, which consisted of this villa and many houses and much land in other parts, all of which have been soldthis is the only portion of the old estates which remains in the familythere were at least twenty servants employed here. He was fond of passing days and nights shut up with his books and papers, but he liked to see company about him. He had numerous friends and acquaintances, and money was freely spent; he would invite a dozen, twenty at a time, who used to come and go as they pleased, living in the house as if it were their own. Mr. Almer and his friends understood each other, and the master was seldom intruded upon. In his solitude he was very, very quiet, but when he came among his guests he was full of life and spirits. He seemed to forget his books, and his studies, and it was hard to believe he was the same gentleman who appeared to be so happy when he was in solitude. He was a good master, and although he appeared to pay no attention to what was passing around him, there was really very little that escaped his notice.

"At the time I speak of he was not a young man; he was fortyfive years of age, and everybody wondered why he did not marry. He laughed, and shook his head when it was mentioned, and said sometimes that he was too old, sometimes that he was happy enough with his books, sometimes that if a man married without loving and being loved he deserved every kind of misfortune that could happen to him; and then he would say that, cold as he might appear, he worshipped beauty, and that it was not possible he could marry any but a young and beautiful woman. I have heard the remark made to



him that the world was full of young and beautiful women, and have heard him reply that it was not likely one would fall at the feet of a man of his age.

"My mother and I were privileged servantsmy mother had been his nurse, and he had an affection for herso that we had opportunities of hearing and knowing more than the others.

"One summer there came to the villa, among the visitors, an old gentleman and his wife, and their daughter. The young lady's name was Beatrice.

"She was one of the brightest beings I have ever beheld, with the happiest face and the happiest laugh, and a step as light as a fairy's. I do not know how many people fell in love with herI think all who saw her. My master, Mr. Almer, was one of these, but, unlike her other admirers, he shunned rather than followed her. He shut himself up with his books for longer periods, and took less part than ever in the gaieties and excursions which were going on day after day. No one would have supposed that her beauty and her winning ways had made any impression upon him.

"It is not for me to say whether the young lady, observing this, as she could scarcely help doing, resolved to attract him to her. When we are young we act from impulse, and do not stop to consider consequences. It happened, however, and she succeeded in wooing him from his books. But there was no lovemaking on his part, as far as anybody could see, and his conduct gave occasion for no remarks; but I remember it was spoken of among the guests that the young lady was in love with our master, and we all wondered what would come of it.

"Soon afterwards a dreadful accident occurred.

"The gentlemen were out riding, and were not expected home till evening, but they had not been away more than two hours before Mr. Almer galloped back in a state of great agitation. He sought Mdlle. Beatrice's mother, and communicated the news to her, in a gentle manner you may be sure. Her husband had been thrown from his horse, and was being carried to the villa dreadfully hurt and in a state of insensibility. Mr. Almer's great anxiety was to keep the news from Mdlle. Beatrice, but he did not succeed. She rushed into the room and heard all.

"She was like one distracted. She flew out of the villa in her white dress, and ran along the road the horsemen had taken. Her movements were so quick that they could not stop her, but Mr. Almer ran after her, and brought her back to the house in a fainting condition. A few minutes afterwards the old gentleman was brought in, and the house was a house of mourning. No dancing, no music, no singing; all was changed; we spoke

in whispers, and moved about slowly, just as if a funeral was about to take place. The doctors gave no hopes; they said he might linger in a helpless state for weeks, but that it was impossible he could recover.

"Of course this put an end to all the festivities, and one after another the guests took their departure, until in a little while the only visitors remaining were the family upon whom such a heavy blow had fallen.

"Mr. Almer no longer locked himself up in his study, but devoted the whole of his time to Mdlle. Beatrice and her parents. He asked me to wait upon Mdlle. Beatrice, and to see that her slightest wish was gratified. I found her very quiet and very gentle; she spoke but little, and the only thing she showed any obstinacy in was in insisting upon sitting by her father's bedside a few hours every day. I had occasion, not very long afterwards, to learn that when she set her mind upon a thing, it was not easy to turn her from it. These gentle, delicate creatures, sometimes, are capable of as great determination as the strongest man.

"'Denise,' said Mr. Almer to me, 'the doctors say that if Mdlle. Beatrice does not take exercise she will herself become seriously ill. Prevail upon her to enjoy fresh air: walk with her in the garden an hour or so every day, and amuse her with light talk; a nature like hers requires sunshine.'

"I did my best to please Mr. Almer; the weather was fine, and not a day passed that Mdlle. Beatrice did not walk with me in the grounds. And here Mr. Almer was in the habit of joining us. When he came, I fell back, and he and Mdlle. Beatrice walked side by side, sometimes arm in arm, and I a few yards behind.

"I could not help noticing the wonderful kindness of his manner towards her; it was such as a father might show for a daughter he loved very dearly. 'Well, well!' I thought. I seemed to see how it would all end, and I believed it would be a good ending, although there were such a number of years between themhe fortyfive, and she seventeen.

"A month passed in this way, and the old gentleman's condition became so critical that we expected every moment to hear of his death. The accident had deprived him of his senses, and it was only two days before his death that his mind became clear. Then a long private interview took place between him and Mr. Almer, which left my master more than ever serious, and more than ever gentle towards Mdlle. Beatrice.

"I was present when the old gentleman died. He had lost the power of speech; his wife was sitting by his bedside holding his hand; his daughter was on her knees with her face buried in the bedclothes; Mr. Almer was standing close, looking down upon them; I was

at the end of the room waiting to attend upon Mdlle. Beatrice. She was overwhelmed with grief, but her mother's trouble, it appeared to me, was purely selfish. She seemed to be thinking of what would become of her when her husband was gone. The dying gentleman suddenly looked into my master's face, and then turned his eyes upon his daughter, and my master inclined his head gravely, as though he was answering a question. A peaceful expression came upon the sufferer's face, and in a very little while he breathed his last."

Here Mother Denise paused and broke off in her story, saying:

"I did not know it would take so long atelling; I have wearied you, my lady."

"Indeed not," said the Advocate's wife; "I don't know when I have been so much interested. It is just like reading a novel. I am sure there is something startling to come. You must go on to the end, Mother Denise, if you please."

"With your permission, my lady," said Mother Denise, and smoothing down her apron, she continued the narrative.

## CHAPTER VII

### A MOTHER'S TREACHERY

"Two days after Mdlle. Beatrice's father was buried, Mr. Almer said to me:

"Denise, I am compelled to go away on business, and I shall be absent a fortnight at least. I leave Mdlle. Beatrice in your care. As a mark of faithful service to me, be sure that nothing is left undone to comfort both her and her mother in their great trouble.'

"I understood without his telling me that it was really Mdlle. Beatrice he was anxious about; everyone who had any experience of the old lady knew that she was very well able to take care of herself.

"On the same day a long conversation took place between my master and the widow, and before sundown he departed.

"It got to be known that he had gone to look after the affairs of the gentleman who died here, and that the ladies, instead of being rich, as we had supposed them to be, were in reality very poor, and likely to be thrown upon the world in a state of poverty, unless they accepted assistance from Mr. Almer. They were much worse off than poor people; having been brought up as ladies, they could do nothing to help themselves.

"While Mr. Almer was away, Mdlle. Beatrice and I became almost friends, I may say. She took great notice of me, and appeared to be glad to have me with her. The poor young lady had no one else, for there was not much love lost between her and her mother. The selfish old lady did nothing but bewail her own hard fate, and spoke to her daughter as if the young lady could have nothing to grieve at in being deprived of a father's love.

"But sorrow does not last forever, my lady, even with the old, and the young shake it off much more readily. So it was, to my mind, quite natural, when Mr. Almer returned, which he did after an absence of fifteen days, that he should find Mdlle. Beatrice much more cheerful than when he left. He was pleased to say that it was my doing, and that I should have no cause to regret it to the last day of my life. I had done so little that the great store he set upon it made me think more and more of the ending to it all. There could be but one natural ending, a marriage, and yet never for one moment had I seen him conduct himself toward Mdlle. Beatrice as a lover. He brought bad news back with him, and when he communicated it to the old lady she walked about the grounds like a distracted person, moaning and wringing her hands.

"I got to know about it, through my young lady. We were out walking in the lanes when we overtook two wretched-looking women, one old and one young. They were in rags, and their white faces and slow, painful steps, as they dragged one foot after another, would have led anybody to suppose that they had not eaten a meal for days. They were truly misery's children.

"Mdlle. Beatrice asked in a whisper, as they turned and looked pitifully at her:

"'Who are they, Denise?'

"'They are beggars,' I answered.

"She took out her purse, and spoke to them, and gave them some money. They thanked her gratefully, and crawled away, Mdlle. Beatrice looking after them with an expression of thoughtfulness and curiosity in her lovely face.

"Denise,' she said presently, 'Mr. Almer, who, before my father's death, promised to look after his affairs, has told us we are beggars.'

"I was very, very sorry to hear it, but I could not reconcile the appearance of the bright young creature standing before me with that of the wretched beings who had just left us; and although she spoke gravely, and said the news was shocking, she did not seem to feel it as much as her words would have led one to believe. It was a singular thing, my lady, that Mdlle. Beatrice wore black for her father for only one day. There was quite a scene between her and her mother on the subject, but the young lady had her way, and only wore her black dress for a few hours.

"'I hate it,' she said; 'it makes me feel as if I were dead.'

"I am sure it was not because she did not love her father that she refused to put on mourning for him. Never, except on that one day, did I see her wear any dress but white, and the only bits of colour she put on were sometimes a light pink or a light blue ribbon. That is how it got to be said, when she was seen from a distance walking in the grounds:

"'She looks like a white shadow.'

"So when she told me she was a beggar, and stood before me, fair and beautiful, dressed in soft white, with a pink ribbon at her throat, and long coral earrings in her ears, I could not understand how it was possible she could be what she said. It was true, though; she and her mother had not a franc, and Mr. Almer, who brought the news, did not seem to

be sorry for it. The widow cried for days and days did nothing but cry and cry, but that, of course, could not go on forever, and in time she became, to all appearance, consoled. No guests were invited to the villa, and my master was alone with Mdlle. Beatrice and her mother.

"It seemed to me, after a time, that he made many attempts to get back into his old groove; but he was not his own master, and could not do as he pleased. Now it was Mdlle. Beatrice who wanted him, now it was her mother, and as they were in a measure dependent upon him he could not deny himself to them. He might have done so had they been rich; he could not do so as they were poor. I soon saw that when Mdlle. Beatrice intruded herself upon him it was at the instigation of her mother, and that, had she consulted her own inclination, she would have retired as far into the background as he himself desired to be. The old lady, however, had set her heart upon a scheme, and she left no stone unturned to bring it about. Oh, she was cunning and clever, and they were not a match for her, neither her daughter, who knew nothing of the world, nor Mr. Almer, who, deeply read as he was, and clever, and wise in many things, knew as little of worldly ways as the young lady he loved and was holding aloof from. For this was clear to me and to others, though I dare say our master had no idea that his secret was known indeed, that it was common talk.

"One morning I had occasion to go into Geneva to purchase things for the house, which I was to bring back with me in the afternoon. As I was stepping into the waggon, Mdlle. Beatrice came out of the gates and said:

"'Denise, will you pass the postoffice in Geneva?'

"'Yes, mademoiselle,' I replied.

"'Here is a letter,' she then said, 'I have just written, and I want it posted there at once. Will you do it for me?'

"'Certainly I will,' I said, and I took the letter.

"'Be sure you do not forget, Denise,' she said, as she turned away.

"'I will not forget, mademoiselle,' I said.

"There was no harm in looking at the envelope; it was addressed to a M. Gabriel. I was not half a mile on the road to Geneva before I heard coming on behind me very fast the wheels of a carriage. We drove aside to let it pass; it was one of our own carriages, and the old lady was in it.

"Ah, Denise,' she said, are you going to Geneva?"

"Yes, my lady.'

"I shall be there an hour before you; I am going to the postoffice to get some letters.' As she said that I could not help glancing at the letter Mdlle. Beatrice had given me, which I held in my hand for safety. 'It is a letter my daughter has given you to post,' she said.

"Yes, my lady,' I could say nothing else.

"Give it to me,' she said, 'I know she wants it posted immediately. It does not matter who posts a letter.'

"She said this impatiently and haughtily, for I think I was hesitating. However, I could do nothing but give her the letter, and as I did not suspect anything wrong I said nothing of the adventure to Mdlle. Beatrice, especially as she did not speak of the letter to me. Had she done so, I might have explained that her mother had taken it from me to post, and quite likely although I hope I am mistaken the strange and dreadful events that occurred before three years passed by might have been avoided.

"The old lady was very civil to me after this, and would continually question me about my master.

"He has a great deal of property?' she asked.

"Yes, madame.'

"He is very rich, Denise?"

"Yes, madame.'

"And comes from an old family?"

"Yes, madame.'

"It is a pity he writes books; but he is highly respected, is he not, Denise?"

"No gentleman stands higher, madame.'

"His nature, Denise though it is exceedingly wrong in me to ask, for I have had experience of it this nature is very kind?"

"Very kind, madame, and very noble."

"A hundred questions of this kind were put to me, sometimes when the young lady was present, sometimes when the mother and I were alone. While this was going on, I often noticed that Mdlle. Beatrice came from her mother's room in great agitation. From a man these signs can be hidden; from a woman, no; man is too often blind to the ways of women. I am sure Mr. Almer knew nothing of what was passing between mother and daughter; but even if he had known he would not have understood the meaning of it I did not at the time.

"Well, all at once the old lady made her appearance among us with a face in which the greatest delight was expressed. She talked to the servants quite graciously, and nodded and smiled, and didn't know what to do to show how amiable she was. 'What a change in the weather!' we all said. The reason was soon forthcoming. Our master and her daughter were engaged to be married.

"We were none of us sorry; we all liked Mdlle. Beatrice, and it was sad to think that a good old race would die out if Mr. Almer remained single all the days of his life. Yes, we talked over the approaching marriage, as did everybody in the village, with real pleasure, and if good feeling and sincere wishes could bring happiness, Mr. Almer and his young and beautiful wife that was to be could not have failed to enjoy it.

"It is true, mademoiselle, is it not?" I asked of her. 'I may congratulate you?'

"I am engaged to be married to Mr. Almer,' she said, 'if that is what you mean.'

"You will have a good man for your husband, mademoiselle,' I said; 'you will be very happy.'

"But here was something in her manner that made me hope the approaching change in her condition would not make her proud. It was cold and distant different from the way she had hitherto behaved to me.

"So the old house was gay again; improvements and alterations were made, and very soon we were thronged with visitors, who came and went, and laughed and danced, as though life were a perpetual holiday.



"But Mdlle. Beatrice was not as lighthearted as before; she moved about more slowly, and with a certain sadness. It was noticed by many. I thought, perhaps, that the contemplation of the change in her life made her more serious, or that she had not yet recovered the shock of her father's death. The old lady was in her glory, ordering here and ordering there, and giving herself such airs that one might have supposed it was she who was going to get married, and not her daughter.

"Mr. Almer gave Mdlle. Beatrice no cause for disquiet; he was entirely and most completely devoted to her, and I am sure that no other woman in the world ever had a more faithful lover. He watched her every step, and followed her about with his eyes in a way that would have made any ordinary woman proud. As for presents, he did not know how to do enough for the beautiful girl who was soon to be his wife. I never saw such beautiful jewelry as he had made for her, and he seemed to be continually studying what to do to give her pleasure. If ever a woman ought to have been happy, she ought to have been."

## CHAPTER VIII

### HUSBAND AND WIFE

"Well, they were married, and the day was never forgotten in the village. Mr. Almer made everybody merry, the children, the grownup people, the poor, and the wellto-do. New dresses, ribbons, flags, flowers, music and feasting from morning to night there was never seen anything like it. The bride, in her white dress and veil, was as beautiful as an angel, and Mr. Almer's face had a light in it such as I had never seen before it shone with pride, and joy, and happiness.

"In the afternoon they departed on their honeymoon tour, and the old lady was left mistress of the villa during the absence of the newly-married pair. She exercised her authority in a way that was not pleasing to us. No wonder, therefore, that we looked upon her with dislike, and spoke of it as an evil day when she came among us; but that did not lessen our horror at an accident which befell her, and which led to her death.

"Mr. and Mrs. Almer had been absent barely three weeks when the old lady going into a distant part of the grounds where workmen were employed in building up some rocks to serve as an artificial waterfall, fell into a pit, and was so frightfully bruised and shaken that, when she was taken up, the doctors declared she could not live another twenty-four hours. Letters were immediately sent off to Mr. Almer, but there was no chance of his receiving them before the unfortunate old lady breathed her last. We did everything we could for her, and she took it into her head that she would have no one to attend to her but me.

"'My daughter is fond of you,' she said on her deathbed, 'and will be pleased that I have chosen you before the other servants. Keep them all away from me.'

"It was many hours before she could be made to believe that there was no hope for her, and when the conviction was forced upon her, she cried, in a tone of great bitterness:

"'This is a fatal house! First my husband now me! Will Beatrice be the next?'

"And then she bemoaned her hard fate that she should have to die just at the time that a life of pleasure was spread before her. Yes, she spoke in that way, just as if she was a young girl, instead of an old woman with white hair. A life of pleasure! Do some people never think of another life, a life of rewards and punishments, according to their actions in this world? The old lady was one of these, I am afraid. Three or four hours before she

died she said she must speak to me quite alone, and the doctors accordingly left the room.

"I want you to tell me the truth, Denise," she said; I had to place my ear quite close to her lips to hear her.

"I will tell you," I said.

"It would be a terrible sin to deceive a dying woman," she said.

"I answered I knew it was, and I would not deceive her.

"Beatrice ought to be happy," she said; 'I have done my best to make her so against her own wishes! But is it likely she should know better than her mother? You believe she will be happy, do you not, Denise?'

"I replied that I could not doubt it; that she had married a good man, against whom no person could breathe a word, a man who commanded respect, and who was looked upon by the poor as a benefactor as indeed he was.

"That is what I thought," said the dying woman; 'that is what I told her over and over again. A good man, a kind man, a rich man, very rich man! And then we were under obligations to him; had Beatrice refused him he might have humiliated us. There was no other way to repay him.'

"I could not help saying to her then that when Mr. Almer rendered a service to anyone he did not look for repayment.

"Ah," she said impatiently, 'but we are of noble descent, and we never receive a favour without returning it. All I thought of was my daughter's happiness. And there was the future hers as well as mine it was dreadful to look forward to. Denise, did my daughter ever complain to you?'

"Never!" I answered.

"Did she ever say I was a hard mother to her that I was leading her wrong that I was selfish, and thought only of myself? Did she? Answer me truly.'

"Never," I said, and I wondered very much to hear her speak in that way. 'She never spoke a single word against you. If she had any such thoughts it would not have been proper for her to have confided them to me. I am only a servant.'

"That is true,' she muttered. 'Beatrice has prideyes, thank God, she has pride, and if she suffers can suffer in silence. But why should she suffer? She has everythingeverything! I torment myself without cause. You remember the letter my daughter gave you to postthe one to M. Gabriel?'

"Yes, madame; you took it from me on the road. I hope I did not do wrong in parting with it. Mademoiselle Beatrice desired me to post it with my own hands.'

"You did right,' she said. 'It does not matter who posts a letter. You did not tell my daughter I took it from you?'

"No, madame.'

"You are faithful and judicious,' she said, but her praise gave me no pleasure. 'If I had lived I would have rewarded you. You must not repeat to my daughter or to Mr. Almer what I have been saying to you. Promise me.'

"I gave her the promise, and then she said that perhaps she would give me a message to deliver to her daughter, her last message; but she must think of it first, and if she forgot it I was to ask her for it. After that she was quiet, and spoke to no one. A couple of hours passed, and I asked the doctors whether she had long to live. They said she could not live another hour. I then told them that she had asked me to remind her of a message she wished me to give to her daughter, and whether it was right I should disturb her. They said that the wishes of the dying should be respected, and that I should try to make her understand that death was very near. I put my face again very close to hers.

"Can you hear me?' I asked.

"Who are you?' she said.

"Her words were but a breath, and I could only understand them by watching the movements of her lips.

"I am Denise.'

"Ah, yes,' she replied. 'Denise, that my daughter is fond of.'

"You wished to give me a message to your daughter.'

"I don't know what it was. I have done everything for the bestyes, everything. And she was foolish enough to rebel, and to tell me that I might live to repent my work; but see how wrong she was. And presently she said: 'Denise, when my daughter comes home ask her to forgive me.'

"These were her last words. Before the sun rose the next morning she was dead.

"Mr. and Mrs. Almer arrived at the villa before she was buried. It was a shocking interruption to their honeymoon, and their appearance showed how much they suffered. It was as if the whole course of their lives had been turned; tears took the place of smiles, sorrow of joy. And how different was the appearance of the village! No feasting, no music and dancing; everybody was serious and sad.

"And all within one short month!

"I gave Mrs. Almer her mother's dying message. When she heard the words such a smile came upon her lips as I hope never again to see upon a human face, it was so bitterly scornful and despairing.

"'It is too late for forgiveness,' she said, and not another word passed between us on the subject.

"Mrs. Almer did not wear mourning for her mother, nor did her husband wish her to do so. I remember his saying to her:

"With some races, white is the emblem of mourning; not for that reason, Beatrice, but because it so well becomes you, I like you best in white.'

"Now, as time went on, we all thought that the sadness which weighed upon Mrs. Almer's heart, and which seemed to put lead into her feet, would naturally pass away, but weeks and months elapsed, and she remained the same. There used to be colour in her cheeks; it was all gone now her face was as white as milk. Her eyes used to sparkle and brighten, but now there was never to be seen any gladness in them; and she, who used to smile so often, now smiled no more. She moved about like one who was walking slowly to her grave.

"Mr. Almer made great efforts to arouse her, but she met him with coldness, and when he spoke to her she simply answered 'yes' or 'no,' and she did nothing whatever to make his home cheerful and happy.

"This weighed upon his spirits, as it would upon the spirits of any man, and during those times I often saw him gazing upon her from a distance, when she was walking in the grounds, with a look in his eyes which denoted how troubled he was. Then, as if some thought had suddenly occurred to him, he would join her, and endeavour to entice her into conversation; but she answered him only when she was compelled, and he became so chilled by her manner that soon he would himself grow silent, and they would pace the garden round and round for an hour together in the most complete silence. It hurt one to see it. They were never heard to quarrel, and the little they said to each other was said in a gentle way; but that seemed to make matters worse. Much better to have spoken outright, so that they might have known what was in each other's minds. A storm now and then is naturally good; it clears the air, and the sun always shines when it is over; but here a silent storm was brooding which never burst, and the only signs of it were seen in the sad faces of those who were suffering, and who did not deserve to suffer.

"Imagine what the house was, my lady, and how we all felt, who loved our master, and would have loved our lady too, if she had allowed us. Cold as she was to us, we could not help pitying her. For my own part I used to think I would rather live in a hut with a quarrelsome husband who would beat and starve me, than lead such a life as my master and mistress were leading.

"Once more, after many months has passed in this dreadful way, my master suddenly resolved to make another attempt to alter things for the better. He locked up his study, and courted his wife with the perseverance and the love of a lover. It was really so, my lady. He gathered posies for her, and placed them on her desk and dressingtable; he spoke cheerfully to her, taking no apparent notice of her silence and reserve; he strove in a thousand little delicate ways to bring pleasure into her life.

"'We will ride out today,' he would say.

"'Very well,' she would answer.

"He would assist her into the saddle, and they would ride away, they two alone, he animated by but one desire to make her happy; and they would return after some hours, the master with an expression of suffering in his face which he would strive in vain to hide, and she, sad, resigned, and uncomplaining. But that silence of hers! That voice so seldom heard, and, when heard, so gentle, and soft, and pathetic! I would rather have been beaten with an oak stick every day of my life than have been compelled to endure it, as he was compelled. For there was no relief or escape for him except in the doing of what it was not in his nature to do to be downright cruel to her, or to find another woman to love him. He would have had no difficulty in this, had he been so minded.

"Still he did not relax his efforts to alter things for the better. He bought beautiful books, and pictures, and dresses, and pet animals for her; he forgot nothing that a man could possibly think of to please a woman. He had frequently spoken to her of inviting friends to the villa, but she had never encouraged him to do so. Now, however, without consulting her, he called friends and acquaintances around him, and in a short time we were again overrun with company. She was the mistress of the house, and it would have been sinful in her to have neglected her duties as Mr. Almer's wife. Many young people came to the villa, and among them one day appeared M. Gabriel, the artist who painted the picture."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE GATHERING OF THE STORM

"At about this time it was generally known that Mr. Almer expected to become a father within three or four months, and some people considered it strange that he should have selected the eve of an event so important for the celebration of social festivities. For my own part I thought it a proof of his wisdom that he should desire his wife to be surrounded by an atmosphere of cheerfulness on such an occasion. Innocent laughter, music, pleasant society what better kind of medicine is there in the world? But it did not do my lady good. She moved about listlessly, without heart and without spirit, and not until M. Gabriel appeared was any change observable in her. The manner in which she received him was sufficiently remarkable. My lady was giving me some instructions as Mr. Almer and a strange gentleman came towards us.

"'Beatrice,' said Mr. Almer, 'let me introduce M. Gabriel to you. A friend whom I have not seen for years.'

"She looked at M. Gabriel, and bowed, and when she raised her head, her face and neck were crimson; her eyes, too, had an angry light in them. M. Gabriel, also, whose natural complexion was florid, turned deathly white as his eyes fell upon her.

"Whether Mr. Almer observed these signs I cannot say; they were plain enough to me, and I did not need anyone to tell me that those two had met before.

"My lady turned from her husband and M. Gabriel in silence, and taking my arm walked into a retired part of the grounds. She could not have walked without assistance, for she was trembling violently; the moment we were alone her strength failed her, and she swooned dead away. I thought it prudent not to call or run for assistance, and I attended to her myself. Presently she recovered, and looking around with a frightened air, asked if any person but myself had seen her swoon. I answered 'No,' and for a moment I thought she had some intention of confiding in me, but she said nothing more than 'Thank you, Denise; do not speak of my fainting to any person; it is only that I am weak, and that the least thing overcomes me. Be sure that no one hears of it.' 'No one shall from me, my lady,' I said. She thanked me again, and pressed my hand, and then we went into the house.

"After that, there was no perceptible difference in her manner toward M. Gabriel than towards her other guests, but I, whose eyes were in a certain way opened, could not help observing that M. Gabriel watched with anxiety her every movement and every



expression. The summerhouse in which all those pictures are stored away was given to M. Gabriel for a studio, and there he painted and passed a great deal of his time. Mr. Almer often joined him there, and if appearances went for anything, they spent many happy hours together. About three weeks after M. Gabriel came to the villa my master took his wife into the studio, and they remained there for some time. It was understood that my lady had been prevailed upon to allow M. Gabriel to paint her portrait. From that time my lady's visits to the summerhouse were frequent, at first always in her husband's company, but afterwards occasionally alone. One day she said to me:

"Denise, I have often wished to ask you a question, but till lately have not thought it worth while."

"I am ready to answer anything, my lady," I said.

"One morning," she said, after a pause, "shortly after my dear father died, I gave you a letter to post for me in Geneva."

"Yes, my lady," I said, and it flashed upon me like a stroke of lightning that the letter she referred to was addressed to M. Gabriel. Never till that moment had I thought of it.

"Did you post the letter for me, Denise, as I desired you? Did you do so with your own hands? Do not tremble. Mistakes often happen without our being able to prevent them even fatal mistakes sometimes. I saw you drive away with the letter in your hand. You did not lose it?"

"No, my lady; but before I had gone a mile on the road to Geneva, your mother overtook me, and said she knew you had given it to me to post immediately in Geneva, and that as she would be at the postoffice a good hour before me which was true she would put it into the post with other letters."

"And you gave her the letter, Denise?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Did my mother desire you not to mention to me that she had taken the letter from you?"

"No, my lady, but on her deathbed"

"I hesitated, and my mistress said. 'Do not fear, Denise; you did no wrong. How should you know that a mother would conspire against her daughter's happiness? On her deathbed my mother spoke to you of that letter?'

"Yes, my lady, and asked me if I had told you that she had taken it from me. I answered no, and she said I had done right. My lady, in telling you this. I am breaking the promise I gave her; I hope to be forgiven.'

"It is right that you should tell me the truth, when I desire you, about an affair I entrusted to you. Had you told me of your own account, it might have been a sin.'

"I can see, my lady, that I should not have parted with the letter. I am truly sorry.'

"The fault was not yours, Denise: the wrongdoing was not yours. I should have instructed you not to part with the letter to anyone; although even then it could not have been prevented; you could not have refused my mother. The past is lost to us forever.' Her eyes filled with tears, and she said, 'We will not speak of this again, Denise.'

"And it was never mentioned again by either of us, though we both thought of it often enough.

"It was easy for me to arrive at an understanding of it. M. Gabriel and my mistress had been lovers, and had been parted and kept apart by my lady's mother. The old lady had played a false and treacherous part towards her daughter, and by so doing had destroyed the happiness of her life.

"Whether my young lady thought that Mr. Almer had joined in the plot against her that was what puzzled me a great deal at the time; but I was certain that he was innocent in the matter, as much a victim to the arts and wiles of a scheming old woman as the unfortunate lady he had married.

"The motive of the treachery was plain enough. M. Gabriel was poor, a struggling artist, with his place to make in the world. My master was rich; money and estates were his, and the old woman believed she would live to enjoy them if she could bring about a marriage between him and her daughter.

"She succeeded too well did she succeed, and she met with her punishment. Though she was dead in her grave I had no pity for her, and her daughter, also, thought of her with bitterness. What misery is brought about by the mad worship of money which fills some persons' souls! As though hearts count for nothing!

"I understood it all now my lady's unhappiness, her silence, the estrangement between her and her husband. How often did I repeat the sad words she had uttered! 'The past is lost to us forever.' Yes, it was indeed true. Sunshine had fled; a gloomy future was before her. Which was the most to be pitied my lady, or her innocent, devoted husband, who lived in ignorance of the wrong which had been done?

"After the conversation I have just related, the behaviour of my mistress toward M. Gabriel underwent a change; she was gracious and familiar with him, and sometimes, as I noticed with grief, even tender. They walked frequently together; she was often in his studio when her husband was absent. Following out in my mind the course of events, I felt sure that explanations had passed between them, and that they were satisfied that neither had been intentionally false to the other. It was natural that this should have happened; but what good could come of this better understanding? Mischievousness was in the air, and no one saw it but myself.

"My lady recovered her cheerfulness; the colour came back to her face; her eyes were brighter, life once more appeared enjoyable to her. Mr. Almer was delighted and unsuspecting; but behind these fair clouds I seemed to hear the muttering of the thunder, and I dreaded the moment when my master's suspicions should be aroused.

"As my lady's time to become a mother drew near, many of the guests took their departure; but M. Gabriel remained. He and Mr. Almer were the closest friends, and they would talk with the greatest animation about pictures and books. M. Gabriel was very clever; the rapidity with which he would paint used to surprise us; his sketches were beautiful, and were hung everywhere about the house. Everybody sang his praises. He had a very sweet voice, he was a fine musician, there was not a subject he was not ready to converse upon. If it came to deep scholarship and learning I have no doubt that Mr. Almer held the first place, but my master was never eager, as M. Gabriel was, to display his gifts, and to show off his brilliant qualities in society. Certainly he could not win ladies' hearts as easily as M. Gabriel. These things are in the nature of a man, and one will play for the mere pleasure of winning, while another does not consider it worth his while to try. Of two such men I know which is the better and more deserving of love.

"Rapid worker as M. Gabriel was with his paintings and sketches, my lady's portrait hung upon his hands; he did not seem to be able to satisfy himself, and he was continually making alterations. When Master Christian was born, his mother's picture was still unfinished in M. Gabriel's studio."

## CHAPTER X

### THE GRAVE OF HONOUR

"The birth of the heir was now the most important event; everything gave way to it. Congratulations poured in from all quarters, and it really seemed as if a better era had dawned. I believe I was the only one who mistrusted appearances; I should have been easier in my mind had M. Gabriel left the villa. But he remained, and as long as he and my lady were near each other I knew that the stormclouds were not far off.

"In a few weeks my lady got about again; she was never strong, and now she was so delicate and weak that the doctors would not allow her to nurse her child. I was very sorry for this; had her baby drawn life from her breast it might have diverted her attention from M. Gabriel.

"It is hard to believe that so joyful an event as the birth of her first child should not have softened her heart towards her husband. It is the truth, however; they were no nearer to each other than they had been before. Mr. Almer was not to blame; he did all in his power to win his wife to more affectionate ways, but he might as well have hoped for a miracle as to hope to win a love that was given to another.

"The child thrived, and it was not till he was a year old that the portrait of his mother was finished the picture that is hanging on the wall before me. It was greatly admired, and my master set great store upon it.

"'It is in every way your finest work,' he said to M. Gabriel. 'Were it not that I object to my wife's beauty being made a subject of criticism, I should persuade you to exhibit the portrait.'

"Not long afterwards, M. Gabriel was called away. I thanked God for it. The danger I feared was removed; but he returned in the course of a few weeks, and began to paint again in the summerhouse. While he was absent my lady fell into her former habits of listlessness; when he returned she became animated and joyous. Truly he was to her as the sun is to the flower. This change in her mood, from sadness to gaiety, was so sudden that it frightened me, for I felt that Mr. Almer must be the blindest of the blind if it did not force itself upon his attention. It did not escape his notice; I saw that, from a certain alteration in his manner toward his wife and his friend. It was not that he was colder or less friendly; but when he looked at them he seemed to be pondering upon something which perplexed him. He said nothing to them, however, to express disapproval of their

intimacy. He was not an impulsive man, and I never knew him to commit himself to an important act without deliberation.

"In the midst of his perplexity the storm burst. I was an accidental witness of the occurrence which led to the tragic events of which I have yet to speak.

"There was at this time among our guests an old dowager, who did nothing but tittle-tattle from morning till night about her friends and acquaintances, and who seemed to be always hunting for an opportunity to make ill-natured remarks. A piece of scandal was a great delight to her. Heaven save me from ever meeting with another such a lady.

"I was in one of the wooded walks at some distance from the house, gathering balsam for a fellow-servant whose hand had been wounded, when the voice of this old dowager reached my ears. She was speaking to a lady companion, and I should not have stopped to listen had not Mrs. Almer's name been mentioned in a tone which set my blood tingling.

"'It is scandalous, my dear,' the old dowager was saying, 'the way she goes on with M. Gabriel. Of course, I wouldn't mention it to another soul in the world but you, for it is not my affair. Not that it is not natural, for she is young, and he is young, and Mr. Almer is old enough to be their father; but they really should be more discreet. I can't make up my mind whether Mr. Almer sees it, and considers it best to take no notice, or whether he is really blind to what is going on. Anyway, that does not alter the affair, so far as his wife and M. Gabriel are concerned. Such looks at each other, my dear! such pressing of hands! such sighs! One can almost hear them. It is easy to see they are in love with each other.'

"And a great deal more to the same effect until they walked away from the spot and were out of hearing.

"I was all of a tremble, and I was worrying myself as to what it was best to do when I heard another step close to me.

"It was my master, who must also have been within hearing. His face was stern and white, and there was blood on his lips as though he had bitten them through.

"He walked my way and saw me.

"'How long have you been here, Denise?' he asked.

"I could not tell him a falsehood, and I had not the courage to answer him.

"It is enough,' he said; 'you have heard what I have heard. Not to a living being must a word of what you have heard pass your lips. I have always believed that you had a regard for the honour of my house and name, and it is for that reason I have placed confidence in you. I shall continue to trust you until you give me cause to doubt your good faith. Hasten after that lady and her companion who have been conversing here, and ask them to favour me with an interview. While I speak to them, remain out of hearing.'

"I obeyed him in silence, and conducted the ladies to my master's presence. I am in ignorance of what he said to them, but that evening an excuse was made for their sudden departure from the villa. They left, and did not appear again.

"Grateful as I was at the removal of this source of danger, I soon saw that the time I dreaded had arrived. My master was in doubt whether his wife was faithful to him.

"A more cruel suspicion never entered the mind of man, and as false as it was cruel. Mrs. Almer was a pure woman; basely wronged as she had been, she was a virtuous wife. As I hope for salvation this is my firm belief.

"But how can I blame my master? Smarting with a grief which had sucked all the light out of his days, which had poisoned his life and his hopes, trusting as he had trusted, deceived as he had been deceived, with every offer of love refused and despised, and with, as he believed, dishonour staring him in the face he might well be pardoned for the doubt which now took possession of him.

"He planned out a course, and steadily followed it. Without betraying himself, he watched his wife and his friend, and he could not fail to see that the feelings they entertained for each other were stronger than the ordinary feelings of friendship which may properly be allowed between a man and a woman. I know, also, that he discovered that my lady, before she married him, had accepted M. Gabriel as her lover. This in itself was sufficient for him.

"Under such circumstances it was, in his opinion, a sin for any woman to plight her faith and duty to another. To my master the words used at the altar were, in the meaning they conveyed, most sacred, solemn and binding. For a woman to utter them, with the image of another man in her heart, was a fearful and unpardonable crime.

"These perjuries are common enough, I believe, in the great world which moves at a distance from this quiet spot, but that they are common does not excuse them. Mr.

Almer had strict and stern views of the duties of life, and roused as he was roused, he carried them out with cruel effect.

"Gradually he got rid of all his guests, with the exception of M. Gabriel; and then, one fatal morning, he surprised my lady and M. Gabriel as they sat together in the summerhouse. There was no guilt between them; they were conversing innocently enough, but my lady was in tears, and M. Gabriel was endeavouring to console her. Sufficient, certainly, to work a husband into a furious state.

"None of us knew what passed or what words were spoken; something terrible must have been uttered, for my lady, with a face like the face of death, tottered from the summerhouse to this very room, where she lay in a fainting condition for hours. Her husband did not come near her, nor did he make any inquiries after her, but in the course of an hour he gave me instructions to have every sketch and painting made by M. Gabriel taken from the walls of the villa, and conveyed to the summerhouse. I obeyed him, and all were removed except this portrait of my lady; it seemed to me that I ought not to allow it to be touched without her permission, and she was not in a fit condition to be disturbed.

"While this work was being accomplished no servant but myself was allowed to enter the studio. Two strange men carried the pictures into the summerhouse, and these men, who had paintpots and brushes with them, remained with Mr. Almer the whole of the afternoon.

"Dinner was served, but no one sat down to it. My lady was in her chamber, her husband was still in the summerhouse, and M. Gabriel was wandering restlessly about. In the evening he addressed me.

"Where is Mr. Almer?' he asked.

"In the summerhouse,' I replied.

"Go to him,' he said, 'and say I desire to have a few words with him.'

"In a few minutes they confronted each other on the steps which led to the studio.

"Enter,' said my master; 'you also, Denise, so that you may hear what I have to say to M. Gabriel, and what he has to say to me.'

"I entered with them, and could scarcely believe my eyes. The walls of the studio had been painted a deep black. Not only the walls, but the woodwork of the windows which gave light to the room. The place resembled a tomb.

"M. Gabriel's face was like the face of a corpse as he gazed around.

"This is your doing,' he said to my master, pointing to the black walls.

"Pardon me,' said my master; 'it is none of my work. You are the artist here, and this is the picture you have painted on my heart and life. Denise, are all M. Gabriel's sketches and paintings in this studio?'

"They are all here, sir,' I replied.

"There was a sense of guilt at my heart, for I thought of my lady's portrait. Fortunately for me my master did not refer to it.

"M. Gabriel,' said my master to the artist, 'these paintings are your property, and are at your disposal for one week from this day. Within that time remove them from my house. You will have no other opportunity. At the end of the week this summerhouse will be securely locked and fastened, and thereafter, during my lifetime, no person will be allowed to enter it. For yourself a carriage is now waiting for you at the gates. I cannot permit you to sleep another night under my roof.'

"I had no intention of doing so,' said M. Gabriel, 'nor should I have remained here so long had it not been that I was determined not to leave without an interview with you.'

"What do you require of me?'

"Satisfaction.'

"Satisfaction!' exclaimed my master, with a scornful smile. 'Is it not I rather should demand it?'

"Demand it, then,' cried M. Gabriel. 'I am ready to give it to you.'

"I am afraid,' said my master coldly, 'that it is out of your power to afford me satisfaction. Were you a man of honour events might take a different course. It is only lately that I have seen you in your true colours; to afford you the satisfaction you demand would be, on my part, an admission that you are my equal. You are not; you are



the basest of cowards. Depart at once, and do not compel me to call my servants to force you from my gates.'

"'Endeavour to evade me,' said M. Gabriel, as he walked to the door, 'in every way you can, you shall not escape the consequences of your conduct.'

"He carried it with a high hand, this fine gentleman who had brought misery into this house; had I been a man I should have had a difficulty in preventing myself from striking him.

"When he was gone my master said:

"'You are at liberty to repeat to your lady what has passed between me and M. Gabriel.'

"I did not repeat it: there was such a dreadful significance in the black walls, and in my master's words, that that was the picture M. Gabriel had painted on his heart and life, that I could not be so cruel to my lady as to tell her what had passed between the two gentlemen who held her fate in their hands.

"But she herself, on the following day, questioned me:

"'You were present yesterday,' she said, 'at an interview between M. Gabriel and my husband?'

"'Yes, my lady,' I answered.

"'Did they meet in anger, Denise?'

"'M. Gabriel was angry, my lady,' I said.

"'And my husband?' she asked.

"'Appeared to be suffering, my lady.'

"'Did they part in anger?'

"'On M. Gabriel's side, my lady, yes.'

"'Is M. Gabriel in the villa?'

"'No, my lady. He departed last night.

"Of his own accord?"

"My master bade him go, and M. Gabriel said he intended to leave without being bidden."

"It could not be otherwise. My husband is here?"

"Yes, my lady."

"That was all that was said on that day. The next day my lady asked me again if her husband was in the villa and I answered 'Yes.' The next day she asked me the same question, and I gave the same reply. The fourth day and the fifth she repeated the question, and my reply that my master had not been outside the gates afforded her relief. The fear in her mind was that my master and M. Gabriel would fight a duel, and that one would be killed.

"During these days my lady did not leave her chamber, nor did her husband visit her.

"From the window of this room the summerhouse can be seen, and my lady for an hour or two each day sat at the window, gazing vacantly out.

"On the evening of the fifth day my lady said:

"Denise, there have been workmen busily engaged about the summerhouse. What are they doing?"

"I bore in mind my master's remark to me that I was at liberty to repeat to my lady what had been said by him and M. Gabriel in their last interview. It was evident that he wished her to be made acquainted with it, and it was my duty to be faithful to him as well as to my lady. I informed her of my master's resolve to fasten the doors of the summerhouse and never to allow them to be opened during his lifetime.

"There are only two more days,' she said, 'tomorrow and the next.'

"I prayed silently that she would not take the fancy in her head to visit the summerhouse before it was fastened up, knowing the shock that the sight of the black walls would cause her.

"The next day she did not refer to the subject, but the next, which was the last, she sat at the window watching the workmen bring their tools and bars and bolts to complete the work for which they had been engaged.

"Come with me, Denise,' she said. 'A voice whispers to me that there is something concealed in the summerhouse which I must see before it is too late.'

"My lady,' I said, trembling, 'I would not go if I were in your place.'

"I could not have chosen worse words.

"You would not go if you were in my place!' she repeated. 'Then there is something concealed there which it is necessary for me to see. Unless,' she added, looking at me for an answer, 'my husband prohibits it.'

"He has not prohibited it, my lady.'

"And yet you would not go if you were in my place! Cannot you see that I should be false to myself if I allowed that place to be sealed forever against me, before making myself acquainted with something that has taken place therein? You need not accompany me, Denise, unless you choose.'

"I will go with you, my lady,' I said, and we went out of the villa together.

"We entered the summerhouse, my lady first, I a few steps behind her.

"She placed her hands upon her eyes and shuddered, the moment she saw the black walls. She understood what was meant by this sign.

"But there was more to come, of which, up to that day, I had been ignorant. On one of the walls was painted in white, the words,

"The Grave Of Honour.'

"It was like an inscription on a tomb.

"When my lady opened her eyes they fell upon these cruel words. For many minutes she stood in silence, with eyes fixed on the wall, and then she turned towards me, and by a motion of her hand, ordered me to leave the place with her. Never, never, had I seen

such an expression of anguish on a face as rested on hers. It was as though her own heart, her own good name, her own honour, were lying dead in that room! There are deeds which can never be atoned for. This deed of my master's was one."

## CHAPTER XI

### HUSBAND AND WIFE

"Remain with me, Denise," said my lady, as we walked back to the house. "I am weak, and may need you."

"Then, for the first time, I noticed what gave me hope. She took her baby boy in her arms, and pressed him passionately to her bosom, murmuring:

"I have only you I have only you!"

"It was not that hitherto she had been wanting in tenderness, but that in my presence she had never so yearningly displayed it. It gladdened me also to think that her child was a comfort to her in this grave crisis.

"But the hope I indulged in was doomed to disappointment. In the evening my lady bade me ascertain whether her husband was in the villa.

"I went to him, and made the inquiry.

"Tell my wife," he said, in a gentle tone, "that I am ready to wait upon her whenever she desires it."

"It was late in the night when my lady called me to assist her to dress. I did so, wondering at the strange proceeding. She chose her prettiest dress, one which she had worn in her maiden days. She wore no ornaments, or flowers or ribbons of any colour. Simply a white dress, with white lace for her head and shoulders.

"Now go to your master," she said, "and say I desire to see him."

"I gave him the message, and he accompanied me to this room, where my lady was waiting to receive him, with as much ceremony as if he had been a stranger guest.

"I am here at your bidding," he said, and turning to me, "You can go, Denise."

"You will stay, Denise," said my lady.

"The manner of both was stern, but there was more decision in my lady's voice than in his. I hesitated, not knowing which of them to obey.

"'Stay, then, Denise,' said my master, 'as your mistress desires it.'

"I retreated to a corner of the room, as far away from them as I could get. I was really afraid of what was coming. Within the hearts of husband and wife a storm was raging, all the more terrible because of the outward calm with which they confronted each other.

"'You know,' said my lady, 'for what reason I desired to see you.'

"'I know,' he replied, 'that I expected you would send for me. If you had not, I should not have presented myself.'

"'You have in your mind,' she said, 'matters which concern us both, of which it is necessary you should speak.'

"'It is more than necessary it is imperative that I should speak of the matters you refer to.'

"'The opportunity is yours. I also have something to say when you have finished. The sooner our minds are unburdened the better it will be for you and me.'

"'It were preferable,' he added, 'that what we say to each other should be said without witnesses. Consider whether it will not be best that Denise should retire.'

"'There is no best or worst for me,' she rejoined; 'my course is decided, and no arguments of yours can alter it. Denise will remain, as I bade her, and what you have to say must be spoken in her presence.'

"'Be it so. Denise is the most trusted servant of my house; I have every confidence in her. Otherwise, I should insist upon her leaving the room.'

"'It is right,' said my lady, 'that you should be made acquainted with a resolution I have come to within the last few hours. After this night I will never open my lips to you, nor, willingly, will I ever listen to your voice. I swear most solemnly that I am in earnest as truly in earnest as if I were on my deathbed!'

"I shuddered; her voice and manner carried conviction with them. My master turned to me, and said:

"'What you hear must never pass your lips while your mistress and I are alive.'

"It never shall,' I said, shaking like a leaf.

"When we are dead, Denise, you can please yourself.' He stood again face to face with his wife. 'Madame, it is necessary that I should recall the past. When I spoke to your lady mother on the subject of my love for you being encouraged and in a measure urged to do so by herself I was frank and open with her. There was nothing in my life which I concealed, which I had occasion to conceal. I had grave doubts as to the suitability of a marriage with you, doubts which did not place you at a disadvantage. I had not the grace of youth to recommend me; there was a serious difference in our ages; my habits of life were staid and serious. You were fit to be the wife of a prince; your youth, your beauty, your accomplishments, entitled you to more than I could offer which was simply a life of ease and the homage of a faithful heart. Only in one respect were we equal in respect of birth. Had I not been encouraged by your mother, I should not have had the temerity to give expression to my feelings; but I spoke, and for me there was no retreating. I begged your lady mother not to encourage me with false hopes, but to be as frank with me as I was with her. Of the doubts which disturbed me, one was paramount. You had moved in the world you had been idolised in society and it scarcely seemed possible that your heart could be disengaged. In that case, I informed your lady mother that no earthly consideration could induce me to step between you and your affections; nay, with all the force which earnestness could convey, I offered to do all in my power if it were possible that my services could avail to aid in bringing your life to its happiest pass. At such a moment as this, a solemn one, madame, which shall never be forgotten by you or by me, I may throw aside false delicacy, and may explain the meaning of these last words to your mother. Having had in my hands the settlement of your father's affairs, I knew that you were poor, and my meaning was, that if any money of mine could assist in bringing about a union between you and the object of your affections did any such exist it was ready, cheerfully offered and cheerfully given for such a purpose. I made but one stipulation in the matter that it should never, directly or indirectly, be brought to your knowledge.'

"He paused, in the expectation that his wife would speak, and she said coldly:

"You are doubtless stating the truth.'

"The simple truth, madame, neither more nor less; and believe it or not, as you will, it was your welfare, not mine, that was uppermost in my mind. Your lady mother assured me that before you came to the villa your heart was entirely free, but that since you honoured me by becoming my guest, you had fixed your affections upon myself. My astonishment was great; I could scarcely believe the evidence of my senses. I entreated your lady mother not to mislead me, and she proved to me to me, to whom the workings

of a woman's heart were as a sealed book in a hundred different ways, which she said I might have discovered for myself if I had had the wit that you most truly loved me. She professed to be honoured by my proposal, which she accepted for you, and which she said you would joyfully accept for yourself. But she warned me not to be disappointed in the manner in which you would receive me; that your pride and shame might impel you to appear reluctant instead of joyful, and that it behoved me, as a wise man Heaven help me! to put a right and sensible construction on the natural maidenly reserve of a young girl. The rest you know. The wise man, madame, has been sadly at fault; it has been fatally proved to him that he knows little of the workings of the human heart.'

"She held up her hand as a sign that she wished to speak, and he paused. A little thing struck me at the time, which has never passed out of my mind. She held up her hand in front of the lamp, and the light shone through the thin, delicate fingers. Seldom do I think of my lady without seeing that slight, beautiful hand, with the pink light shining through it.

"My mother,' she said, 'did not speak the truth. M. Gabriel and I were affianced before I became your guest.'

"Your information comes too late,' said my master; 'you should have told me so much when I offered you my name. It would have been sufficient. I should not have forced myself upon you, and shame and sin would have been avoided.'

"There has been no sin,' said my lady, 'and who links me with shame brings shame upon himself. I have been wronged beyond the hope of reparation in this life. Before you spoke to me of marriage I wrote to M. Gabriel frequently from this villa. My letters were intercepted'

"He interrupted her. 'To my knowledge no letters were intercepted; I had no suspicion of such a proceeding.'

"I do not say you had; I am making you acquainted with a fact. Hurt and vexed at receiving no reply to my letters, and being able to account for it only on the supposition that they had not come into his possession, I wrote one and gave it to Denise to post for me. That also, as I learnt after my mother's death, was intercepted, and never reached its destination. In the meantime, false information was given to me respecting M. Gabriel; shameful stories were related to me, in which he was the principal actor. He was vile and false, as I was led to believe; and you were held up to me as his very opposite, as noble, chivalrous, generous, disinterested'



"In all of which you will bear in mind, I was in no way inculpated, being entirely ignorant of what was going on under my roof."

"And I was, besides, led to believe by my mother that you had laid us under such obligations that there was but one repayment of them"

"Plainly speaking," he interposed, "that, in any kindness I had shown, I was deliberately making a purchase, that in every friendly office I performed, I had but one cowardly end in view. It needed this to complete the story."

"My heart was almost broken," she continued, making no comment on his bitter interruption; "but it was pointed out to me that I could at least answer the call of gratitude and duty. Doubly did my mother deceive me."

"And doubly," said my master, "did you deceive me."

"When, some time after our unhappy marriage, you introduced M. Gabriel into this house, I was both angry and humiliated. It looked as though you intended to insult me, and Denise was a witness of my agitation. It was not unnatural that, remaining here, your guestbidden by you, not by me for so long a time explanations should pass between M. Gabriel and myself. Then it was that my eyes were really opened to the pit into which I had been deliberately dragged."

"Not by me were you dragged into this pit."

"Let it pass for a moment," she said, in a disdainful voice. "When my eyes were opened to the truth, how was I to know that you had not shared in the plot against me? How am I to know it now?"

"By my denial. Doubt me if you will, and believe that I tricked to obtain you. I shall not attempt to undeceive you. No good purpose would be served by a successful endeavour to soften your feelings towards me; I do not, indeed, desire that they should be softened, for no link of love can ever unite us. It never did, and never can, and I am not a man to live upon shams. If I tricked to obtain you, you will not deny that I have my reward a rich reward, the rank fruit of which will cling to me and abide with me till the last moment of my life."

"I went into the summerhouse this afternoon," she said.

"I know it."

"It was your intention that I should visit it.'

"It was not exactly my intention; I left it to chance.'

"You have made it a memorial of shame, of a cruel declaration against me!'

"I have made it a memorial of my own deep unhappiness. That studio will never again be opened during your life and mine. Madame, in all that you have said and I have followed you attentively you have not succeeded in making me believe that I have anything to reproach myself for. My blindness was deplorable, but it is not a reproach. My actions were distinguished at least by absolute candour and frankness. Can you assert the same? You loved M. Gabriel before you met me as I to blame for that? You were made to believe he was false to you as I to blame for that? You revenged yourself upon him by accepting my hand, and I, unversed in woman's ways, believed that no pure-minded woman would marry a man unless she loved him. I still believe so. When we stood before the altar, I was happy in the belief that your heart was mine; and certainly from that moment, your faith, your honour, were pledged to me, as mine was pledged to you. M. Gabriel was my friend. I was a man when he was a boy, and I became interested in him, and assisted him in his career. We had not met for years: he knew that I had married'

"But he did not know,' interrupted my lady, 'that you had married me!'

"Granted. Was I to blame for that? After our marriage you fell into melancholy moods, which I at first ascribed to the tragic fate of your parents. Most sincerely did I sympathise with you. Day after day, night after night, did I ponder and consider how I could bring the smile to your lips, how I could gladden your young heart. Reflect upon this, madame, in the days that are before you, and reflect upon the manner in which you received my attentions. At one time, when I had invited to the villa a number of joyous spirits in the hope that their liveliness and gaiety would have a beneficial effect upon you, I received a letter from M. Gabriel with reference to a picture he was painting. I invited him here, and he came. What was his duty, what was yours, when you and he met in my presence, when I introduced you to each other, for the first time as I thought? Madame, if not before him, at least before you, there was but one honest course. Did you pursue it? No; you received M. Gabriel as a stranger, and you permitted me to rest in the belief that until that day you had been unconscious of his existence. Without referring to my previous sufferings which, madame, were very great in what position did I, the husband, stand in relation to my wife and friend, who, in that moment of introduction, tacitly conspired against my honour, and who, after explanations had passed between them, met and conversed as lovers? Their guilt was the more heinous because of its secrecy and utterly, utterly unpardonable because of their treachery towards him who

trusted in them both. A double betrayal! But at length the husband's suspicions were aroused. In a conversation which he accidentally overheard between two ladies who were visiting him the name of his wife your name, madame was mentioned in connection with that of M. Gabriel; and from their conversation he learnt that their too friendly intimacy had become a subject for common talk. Jealous of his honour, and of his name, upon which there had hitherto been no blot, he silenced the scandalmongers; but from that day he more carefully observed his wife and his friend, until the truth was revealed. Then came retribution, and a black chapter in the lives of three human beings was closed though the book itself is not yet completed.'

"He paused, a long time as it seemed to me, before he spoke again. The silence was awful, and in the faces of the husband and the wife there were no signs of relenting. They bore themselves as two persons might have done who had inflicted upon each other a mortal wrong for which there was no earthly forgiveness. From my heart I pitied them both."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE COMPACT

"You sent for me, madame," he said presently, "because it was necessary that some explanation should be given of the occurrences that have taken place in my family, of which you are a member. Each of us has reason to regret an alliance which has caused us so much suffering. Unfortunately for our happiness and our peace of mind the truth has been spoken too late; but it were idle now to waste time in lamentations. There are in life certain bitter trials which must be accepted; in that light I accept the calamity which has fallen upon us, and which, had I known before our marriage what I know now, would most surely have been averted. It was in your power to avert it; you did not do so, but led me blindly into the whirlpool. You have informed me that, after this night, you will never open your lips to me, nor ever again listen to my voice."

"Nor will I," she said, "from the rising of tomorrow's sun."

"I shall do nothing to woo you from that resolve. But you bear my name, and to some extent my honour is still in your keeping."

"Have you, then," she asked, "any commands to give me?"

"It will depend," he replied, "upon what I hear from you. So far as my honour is concerned I intend to exercise control over you; no farther."

"Your honour is safe with me, as it has always been."

"I will not debate the point with you. You say that you have decided on your course, and that no arguments of mine will turn you from it."

"Yes; my course is decided. Am I free to go from your house?"

"You are not free to go. Only one thing shall part us death!"

"We have a child," she said, and her voice, for that moment, insensibly softened.

"Is he asleep?"

"Yes."

"He went into the inner room, and remained there for several minutes, and my lady, with a white and tearless face, waited for his return.

"I thought I heard the sound of kisses in the bedroom, but I could not be sure. There was, however, a tender light in my master's eyes when he came back, a light which showed that his heart was touched.

"Our child shall remain with you,' he said to my lady, 'if you wish.'

"I do wish it," she said.

"I will not take him from you, only that I must sometimes see him.'

"He shall be brought to you every day.'

"I am content. Let him grow up to love me or hate me, as the prompting of his nature and your teaching shall direct. From my lips he shall never hear a disparaging word of his mother.'

"Nor shall he, from my lips, of his father.'

"He bowed to her as he would have bowed to a princess, and said:

"I thank you. But little, then, remains to be said. We are bound to each other irrevocably, and we cannot part without disgrace. We have brought our griefs upon ourselves, and we must bear them in silence. The currents of my life are changed, and these gates shall never again be opened to friends. I have done with friendship as I have done with love. I ask you what course you have determined upon?'

"I propose,' said my lady, 'to make these rooms my home, if you will give them to me to live in.'

"They are yours,' he replied. 'Unless I am compelled by duty, or by circumstances which I do not at present foresee, I will never enter them during your lifetime.'

"It is as I would have it,' she said. 'In daylight I shall not leave them. If I walk in the grounds it shall be at nightfall. Outside your gates I will never more be seen, nor will I allow a friend or an acquaintance to visit me. Will you allow Denise to wait upon me?'

"She is your servant, and yours only, from this moment. I am pleased that you have selected her.'

"Denise,' said my lady to me, 'are you willing to serve me?'

"Yes, my lady,' I answered. I was almost choked with sobs, while they were outwardly calm and unmoved.

"Then there is nothing more to be said except farewell.' And my lady looked towards the door.

"He did not linger a moment. He bowed to her ceremoniously, and left the room.

"When he was gone I felt as if some sudden and fearful shock must surely take place, as if a thunderbolt would fall and destroy us, or as if my lady would fall dead at my feet, the silence that ensued was so unearthly. But nothing occurred, and when I had courage to look up I saw my lady sitting in a chair, white and still, with a resigned and determined expression on her face. It would have been a great relief to me if she had cried, but there was not a tear in her eyes.

"Do you believe me guilty, Denise?' she asked.

"The saints forbid,' I cried, 'that such a wicked thought should enter my mind! I know you to be an innocent, suffering lady.'

"You will do as you have been bidden to do, Denise. While my husband and I are living you will not speak of what has passed within this room.'

"I will not, my lady.'

"And never again was the subject referred to by either of us. She did not make the slightest allusion to it, and I did not dare to do so."

## CHAPTER XIII

### MOTHER DENISE HAS STRANGE FANCIES IN THE NIGHT

"A new life now commenced for us a new and dreadful life. Mr. Almer gave orders that no person was to be admitted to the villa without his express permission. He denied himself to every chance visitor, and from that time until you came, my lady, no friend of the family, except a great banker, and occasionally Master Pierre Lamont, both of whom came upon business, ever entered the gates. The doctor, of course, when he was needed; but no one else.

"Mr. Almer passed most of his time in his study, writing and reading, and pacing to and fro as he used to do in times gone by. He did not make any enquiries about my lady, nor did she about him. She lived in these rooms, and, in my remembrance, did not stir out of them during the day. Master Christian slept in the inner room there, and was free to roam about as he pleased.

"Every morning I took the child to his father, who sometimes would kiss him and send him back to my lady, and sometimes would say:

"'You can leave him with me, Denise, for an hour.'

"Then he would take the child into the study, and lock the door, and nurse and sing to him. I was in the habit of seeing him thus engaged as I walked backwards and forwards in the grounds in front of the study, waiting for his summons to carry master Christian to his mother.

"His was not a happy childhood, for when he began to speak and think, the estrangement between his parents puzzled him deeply, and made him sad. He was continually asking questions to which he received replies which perplexed him more and more. With childlike, innocent cunning he strove to draw them to each other. When he was with my lady, it was:

"'Mamma, why do you not go and speak to papa? There he is walking in the garden. Come out with me, mamma come quickly, or papa will be gone.'

"And when he was with his father he would say:

"'Papa, I have a message for you.'

"Yes, Christian,' my master would say.

"You are to take hold of my hand, and come with me immediately to mamma. Yes, papa, indeed, immediately! She wants to speak to you.'

"Mr. Almer knew that this was nothing but invention on the child's part.

"What they learnt of each other's health and doings came through Master Christian; it is very hard, my lady, to stop a child's innocent prattle.

"Papa, I wish to tell you something.'

"Tell me, Christian.'

"Mamma has a bad headache such a bad, bad headache! I have been smoothing her forehead with my hand, but it will not go away for me. You cured my headache last week; come and cure mamma.'

"And at another time:

"Papa, is not this beautiful?'

"Yes, Christian, it is very pretty.'

"Mamma painted it for me. Do you know, papa, she has painted me, my portrait, and has put it in a book. It is exactly like you could not tell it from me myself. Shall I ask her to give it to you or will you come and ask for it yourself?'

"With my lady it was the same.

"Mamma, papa has been writing all day long. I peeped through the window, and he looked so tired just as you look sometimes. Now, mamma, tell me do you think papa is happy?'

"Mamma, see what papa has given me a musical box! Only because I said to him I should like a musical box! Is he not good?'

"And so it went on day after day, week after week, but the child's eager, anxious love brought them no nearer to each other.



"In the dark nights when the weather permitted, my lady walked in the grounds. At first I offered to accompany her, but she refused my company.

"I will walk alone, Denise.'

"The servants used to say, as the moonlight fell on her white dress:

"She looks like a white ghost.'

"And at other times:

"She is like a white shadow moving in the moon's light.'

"Her husband was careful to keep out of her sight when she indulged in these lonely rambles. They would not make the slightest advance to each other.

"I must not forget to tell you what occurred about a month after this estrangement. The duties of my attendance on my lady did not keep me with her during the night unless she was ill, and was likely to require my services. Generally I waited till I saw her abed and asleep. She retired early, and this afforded me an opportunity of looking after the room occupied by my husband and myself.

"I remember that on this night I drew the blind aside after I was undressed, and looked toward my master's study. There were lights in the windows, as usual. I was not surprised, for Mr. Almer frequently sat up the whole night through.

"I went to bed, and soon fell asleep.

"Quite contrary to my usual habit, I woke up while it was dark, and heard the sound of the clock striking the hour. I counted the strokes, from one to twelve. It was midnight.

"I was such a good sleeper seldom waking till the morning, when it was time to get up that I wondered to myself what it was that awoke me. The striking of the clock? Hardly for that was no new sound. What, then? Gusts of wind were sweeping round the walls of the villa. 'Ah,' I thought, 'it was the wind that disturbed me;' and I settled myself for sleep again, when suddenly another sound an unusual one this time made me jump up in bed. The sound was like that of a heavy object jumping, or falling, from a height within the grounds.

"Can it be robbers,' I thought, 'who have climbed the gates, and missed their footing?'

"The thought alarmed me, and I woke my husband, and told him what I had heard. He rose, and looked out of the window.

"'Mr. Almer is up and awake,' said he. 'If there were any cause for alarm he would not be sitting quietly in his study, poring over his books. What you heard is the wind. Robbers, indeed! I pity the thief who tries to pass our dogs; he would be torn to pieces. There! let me get to sleep, and don't disturb me again with your foolish fancies; and get to sleep yourself as quick as you can. Now your head is stirring, you'll be imagining all sorts of things.'

"That was all the satisfaction I could get out of him; the next moment he was fast asleep again.

"It was no easy thing for me to follow his example. I lay thinking and thinking for an hour or more. I was glad my husband had mentioned the dogs; in my alarm I had forgotten them. Martin was quite right. Any stranger who attempted to pass them would have been torn to pieces.

"Well, but there was somebody walking on the gravelpaths! I heard soft footsteps crunching the stones, stepping cautiously, as though fearful of disturbing the people in the house. These sounds came to my ears between the gusts of wind, which were growing stronger and stronger.

"I was on the point of rousing my husband again when it occurred to me that it might be my master, who, restless as usual, was walking about the grounds.

"This explanation quieted me, and I was soon asleep. For how long I cannot say, for suddenly I found myself sitting up in bed, wide awake, listening to the wind, which was shaking the house to its foundations. And yet the impression was so strong upon me that it was not the storm that had frightened me, that I went to the window and looked out, expecting to see Heaven only knows what. Nothing was to be seen, and presently I reasoned myself out of my fears, and was not again disturbed during the night.

"In the morning a strange discovery was made. A servant came running to me before I was dressed, with the information that our two dogs were dead. I hurried to the kennel and saw their bodies stretched out, cold and stiff.

"Mr. Almer was very fond of these dogs, and I went to him and told him what had occurred. There was a strange, wild look in his eyes which I attributed to want of sleep. But stranger than this weary, wild expression was the smile on his lips when he heard the news.

"He followed me to the kennel, and stooped down.

"They are quite dead, Denise,' he said.

"Yes, sir,' I said, 'but who could have done such a cruel thing?'

"The dogs have been poisoned,' he said, 'here is the meat that was thrown to them. There is still some white powder upon it.'

"Poisoned!' I cried. 'The wretches.'

"Whoever did this deed,' said my master, 'deserved to die. It is as bad as killing a human creature in cold blood.'

"Are you sure, sir,' I said, 'there has been nothing stolen from the house?'

"You can go and see, Denise.'

"I made an examination of the rooms. Nothing had been taken from them. I tried the door of my master's study to examine that room also, but it was locked. When I returned my master was still kneeling by the dogs.

"It does not appear that anything has been taken,' I said, 'but the sounds I heard in the night prove that there have been robbers here.'

"What sounds did you hear?' asked my master, looking up.

"I told him of my alarm, and of my waking my husband, and of my fancies.

"Fancies!' he said; 'yes it could have been nothing but imagination. I have been up the whole night, and had there been an attempt at robbery, I must surely have known it. Were any of the other servants disturbed?'

"No, sir.'

"I had already questioned them, but they had all slept soundly and had heard nothing. I had been also with my lady for a few moments, but she had not been disturbed during the night by anything but the howling of the wind.

"Let the matter rest,' said my master; 'it will be best. It is my wish that you do not speak of it. The dogs are dead, and nothing can restore them to life. Evil deeds carry their own punishment with them! The next time you are frightened by fancies in the night, and see a light in my study, you may be satisfied that all is well.'

"So the dogs were buried, and no action was taken to punish their murderers; and in a little while the whole affair was forgotten."

## CHAPTER XIV

### CHRISTIAN ALMER'S CHILDLIFE

"The years went by in the lonely villa without any change, except that my lady grew into the habit of taking her walks in the grounds later in the night. Not a word was exchanged between her and her husband; had seas divided them they could not have been further apart from each other.

"A dreadful, dreary monotony of days. The direction and control of the house was left entirely to me; my master took not the slightest interest in what was going on. I should have asked to be relieved from the service, had it not been for my affection for my mistress. To live with her as I did for years, attending upon her daily without loving her was not possible. Her gentleness, her resignation, her resolution, her patience, were almost beyond belief with those who were not constant witnesses of her lonely, blameless, suffering life.

"She never wrote or received a letter. She severed herself entirely from the world, and these rooms were her living grave.

"She loved her child, but she did not give way to any violent demonstration of feeling. I observed, as the lad grew up, that he became more and more perplexed by the relations which existed between his parents. Had one or the other been unkind to him, he might have been able to put a reasonable construction upon the estrangement, but they were equally affectionate, equally tender towards him. He continued to exercise the prettiest cunning to bring them together, but without avail. Without avail, also, the entreaties he used.

"'Mamma, the sun is shining beautifully. Do come out with me and speak to papa. Do, mamma, do! See, he is walking in the garden.'

"'Mamma, may I bring papa into your room? Say yes. I am sure he would be glad.'

"'Papa, mamma is really very ill. I do so wish you would see her and speak to her! There, papa, I have hold of your hand. Come, papa, come!'

"It was heartbreaking to hear the lad, who loved both, who received love from both.

"'Mamma,' he said, 'are you rich?'

"In what way, dear child?' she asked, I have no doubt wondering at his question; 'in money? Do you mean that?'

"Yes, mamma, I mean that.'

"We are not in want of money, Christian.'

"Then you can buy whatever you want, mamma.'

"I want very little, Christian.'

"But if you wanted a great deal,' he persisted, 'you have money to pay for it?'

"Yes, Christian.'

"And papa, too?'

"Yes, and papa too.'

"I can't make it out,' he said. 'Yesterday, I saw a poor little girl crying. I asked her what she was crying for, and she said her mamma was in great trouble because they had no money. I asked her if money would make her mamma happy, and she said yes. Then why does it not make you happy?'

"Would you like some money, Christian,' said my lady, 'to give to this poor girl's mamma?'

"Yes, mamma.'

"Here is my purse. Denise will go with you at once.'

"We went to the cottage, and found that the family were in deep distress. The father was in arrears with his rent, having been unable to work, through illness, for a good many weeks; he was now strong enough to return to his employment, but he was plunged into such difficulties that all his courage had deserted him. The mother was weak with overpowering anxiety, and the children were in want of food.

"I saw that the family were deserving of assistance, and I directed Master Christian what to give them. He visited them daily for a week and more, and the roses came back to the children's cheeks, and the hearts of the father and mother were filled with hope and gladness.

"'Mamma,' said Master Christian, 'you have no idea how happy they are and all because I gave them a little money. They play and sing together yes, mamma, all of them; it is beautiful to see them. They call me their good angel.'

"'I am very glad you have made them happy, my dear,' said my lady.

"'Mamma, they are happy because they love each other, and because they laugh and sing together. Let me be your good angel, mamma, and papa's. Tell me what to do, so that we may live like those poor people!'

"These were hard things for parents to hear, and harder because no answers could be given to them.

"We went out for a stroll every fine day for an hour or so, and when Master Christian saw a child walking between father and mother, who smiled at each other and their little one, and spoke pleasantly and kindly one to the other, his eyes would fill with tears. He would peep through cottage windows nay, he would go into the cottages, where he was always welcome, and would furnish himself with proofs of domestic happiness which never gladdened his heart in his own home. With scanty food, with ragged clothes, the common peasant children were enjoying what was denied to him.

"He had one especial friend, a delicate child, who at length was laid on a bed of sickness from which he never rose. Master Christian, for a few weeks before this child died, visited him daily in my company, and took the poor little fellow many comforting things, for which the humble family were very grateful. My young master would stand by the bedside of the sick child, and witness, in silent pain, the evidences of paternal love which lightened the load of the little sufferer.

"The day before the child died we approached the cottage, and Master Christian peeped through the window. The child was dying, and by his bedside sat the sorrowing parents. The man's arm was round the woman's waist, and her head was resting on her husband's shoulder. We entered the cottage, and remained an hour, and as we walked home Master Christian said:

"'If I were dying, would my mamma and papa sit like that?'

"I could find no words to answer this question, which showed what was passing in Master Christian's mind.

"'Cannot you tell me,' said Master Christian, 'whether my rich parents would do for me what that little boy's poor parents are doing for him? It is so very much, Denise so very, very much! It is more than money, for money is no use in Heaven, where he is going to. I wish my mamma and papa had been poor; then they would have lived together and have loved each other. Denise, tell me what it all means.'

"'Hush, Master Christian,' I said, trying to soothe him, for his little bosom was swelling with grief. 'When you are a man you will understand.'

"'I want to understand now I want to understand now!' he cried. 'There is something very wicked about our house. I hate it I hate it!'

"And he stamped his foot, and broke into a fit of sobbing so charged with sorrow that I could not help sobbing with him.

"Something of this must have reached his parents' ears, and how they suffered only themselves could have known. My master grew thin and wan; dark circles came round his eyes, and they often had a wild look in them which made me fear he was losing his senses. And my lady drooped and drooped, like a flower planted in unwholesome soil. Paler and quieter she grew every day; sweeter and more resigned, if that were possible, with every setting of the sun; so weak at last that she could not take her walk in the grounds.

"Sitting by the window, looking at the lovely sky, she said to me one peaceful evening:

"'I shall soon be there, Denise.'

"'Oh, my lady!' was all I could say.

"'It rejoices me to think,' she said, 'that this long agony is coming to an end. I pray that the dear child I shall leave behind me will not suffer as I have suffered, that his life may be happy, and his end be peaceful. Denise, my mother is in that invisible spiritland to which I am going. When she sees me coming, will she not be frightened to meet me? for, if it had not been for her, all this misery would have been averted.'

"'My lady,' I said so saintlike was her appearance that I could have knelt to her, 'let me go to my master and bring him to you.'

"'He would not come,' she said, 'at your bidding, Denise. Has he not been often entreated by our child?'



"Believing that this was a sign of relenting on her part, I said:

"He knows that I dare not deceive him. He will come if I say you sent for him.'

"Perhaps, perhaps,' she said; 'but I would not have him come yet. When I summon him here he will not refuse me.'

"You will send for him one day, my lady?'

"Yes, Denise, unless I die suddenly in my sleep and I have often prayed for. But this great blessing may be denied to me.'

"Ah, how sad were the days! It fills me with grief, even now, to speak of them. All kinds of strange notions entered my head during that time. I used to think it would be a mercy if a terrible flood were to come, or if someone would set fire to the villa. It would bring these two unhappy beings together for a few minutes at least. But nothing happened; the days were all alike, except that I saw very plainly that my lady could not live through another summer. She was fading away before my eyes.

"The end came at last, when Master Christian was nearly nine years old."

## CHAPTER XV

### BEATRICE ALMER GIVES A PROMISE TO HER SON

"It was a spring morning, and my lady was alone. Master Christian was in the woods with his father; he was to be home at noon, and my lady was watching for him at her window.

"Exactly at noon the lad returned, beaming with delight; the hours he spent with his father were memorable hours in his life.

"'You have enjoyed yourself, Christian,' said my lady, drawing her boy to her side, and smoothing his hair. 'It does you good to go out with papa.'

"'Yes, mamma,' said the lad, in his eager, excited voice. 'There is no one in the world like papano man, I mean. He knows everythingyes, mamma, everything! There isn't a thing you ask him that he can't tell you all about it. We have had such a beautiful walk; the forests are full of birds and squirrels. Papa knows the name of every bird and flower. See, mamma, all these are wild flowerspapa helped me to gather them, and showed me where some of the prettiest are to be found. You should hear him talk about the flowers! He has told me such wonderful, wonderful things about them! I believe they live, as we do, and that they have a language of their own. Papa smiled when I said I thought the flowers were alive, and he told me that the world was full of the loveliest mysteries, and that, although men thought themselves very wise, they really knew very little. Perhaps it is sowith all men but papa. It is because he isn't vain and proud that he doesn't set himself above other men. In the middle of the woods papa stopped and said, as he waved his hand around, "This, Christian, is Nature's book. Not all the wisdom of all the men in all the world could write one line of it. That little bird flying in the air to the nest which it has built for its young, and which is so small that I could hold it in the palm of my hand, is in itself a greater and more marvellous work than the united wisdom of all mankind shall ever be able to produce." There, mamma, you would hardly believe that I should remember papa's words; but I repeated them to myself over and over again as we walked alongthey sounded so wonderful! Mamma, are there flowers in heaven?'

"'Yes, my dear,' she answered, gazing upwards, 'forever blooming.'

"'Then it is always summer there, mamma?'

"'Yes, dear childit is the better land on which we dwell in hope. Peace is there, and love.'

"We shall all go there, mamma?"

"Yes, dear child one day."

"And shall live there in peace and love?"

"Yes, Christian."

"Mamma," said the child solemnly, "I shall be glad when the day comes on which you and papa and I shall be together there, in peace and love. Mamma, you are crying. I have not hurt you, have I?"

"No, dear child, no. To hear you speak gives me great joy."

"Ah, but I can't speak like papa. He has told me of that better world, and though I can't understand all he says, I know it must be very beautiful. Papa is a good man. I love him more than any other man and I love you, mamma, better than any other woman. Papa is a good man, is he not, mamma?"

"Yes, my child," said my lady, "your father is a good and a just man."

"My heart leapt into my throat as I heard her speak these words of her husband. Was it possible that this dreadful estrangement was to end, and that my master and his wife would at length be reconciled, after all these weary years?"

"My lady was lying back in her chair, gazing now at her boy, now at the bright clouds which were floating in the heavens. Ah, my lady, if we were but to follow God's teaching, and learn the lessons He sends us every day and every hour, how much unhappiness should we be spared! But it seems as if there was a wicked spirit within us which is continually dropping poison into the fairest things, for the mere pleasure of destroying their beauty and making us wretched."

"There was an angelic expression on my lady's face as she encouraged her boy to speak of his father."

"I have often wished to tell you," said Master Christian, "that papa is not strong not as strong as I am. He soon gets tired, while I can run about all day. This morning he often stopped to rest, and once he threw himself upon the ground, and fell fast asleep. I sat by his side and listened to the birds, who were all so happy, while papa's face was filled with pain. Yes, mamma, he was in great pain, and he sighed, oh, so heavily! as though sleep was hurting him instead of doing him good. And he spoke in his sleep, and his

words made me tremble. "I call God to witness" that was what he said, mamma "I call God to witness that there was in my mind no design to do wrong." And then he said something about sin and sorrow springing from the flower of innocence. A bird was flying near us, stopping to look at us, and not at all frightened, because I was so very, very quiet. "Little bird," I whispered, "that my father could hold in the palm of his hand, do you know what he is dreaming of, and will you, because he is my father and a good man, do something to make him happy?" Oh, mamma, the bird at that very moment began to sing, and papa smiled in his sleep, and all the pain in his face disappeared. That bird, mamma, was a fairybird, and knew that papa ought not to suffer. And presently papa awoke, and folded me tight in his arms, and we sat there quite still, for a long, long time, listening to the singing of the bird. Oh, mamma, mamma! why will you not love papa as I do?"

"Who could resist such pleading? My lady could not.

"My child,' she said, 'I will send for papa tomorrow.'

"You will you will!" cried the child. 'Oh, how glad I am! Papa will be here tomorrow, and we shall live together as poor people do, and be happy, as they are!' He sprang from her side, ready to fly out of the room. 'Shall I go and tell papa now? Yes, I may, I may say that I may, mamma!'

"Not till tomorrow, Christian. Come and sit quietly by me, and talk to me.'

"He obeyed her, though it was difficult for him to control himself, his joy was so great. He devised numberless schemes in which he and his parents were to take part. They were to go here, and to go there always together. His friends were to be their friends, and they were to share each other's pleasures. Rambles in the woods, hunting for wild flowers, visits to poor cottages he planned all these things in the delight of his heart.

"So they passed the day, the mother and child, and when night came he begged again to be allowed to go to his father and tell him what was in store for him. But my lady was firm.

"No, Christian,' she said, 'you must wait yet for a few hours. They will soon pass away. You are tired, dear child. Go to bed and sleep well.'

"Good mamma! beautiful mamma!" said the lad, caressing his mother and stroking her face. 'I shall dream all night long of tomorrow!'

"She never kissed her child with deeper tenderness than she did on this night. He knelt at her knees and said his prayers, and of his own accord ended with the words: 'And make my papa and my mamma love each other tomorrow!'

"Goodnight, dear child.'

"Goodnight, dear mamma. I want tomorrow to come quickly. Goodnight, Denise.'

"Goodnight, Master Christian.'

"In a few minutes he was asleep. Then my lady called me to her, and spoke gratefully of the manner in which I had performed my services to her.

"You have been a good and faithful servant to me,' she said, 'and you have helped to comfort me. Your duties have been difficult, and you have performed them well.'

"My lady,' I said sobbing; I could not keep back my tears, she was so gracious and sweet. 'I have done nothing to deserve such thanks. If what you have said to Master Christian comes true I shall be very happy. Forgive me for asking, but is it really true that you will send for my master tomorrow?'

"It will be so, Denise, unless God in His mercy takes me tonight. We are in His hands, and I wait for His summons. His will be done! Denise, wear this cross in remembrance of me. I kiss it before I give it to you and I kiss you, Denise!'

"And as she put the cross round my neck, which she took from her own, she kissed me on the lips. Her touch was like an angel's touch.

"Then she said, pointing to the posy which had been gathered in the woods by her husband and her child:

"Give me those flowers, you faithful woman.'

"Do not think me vain or proud for repeating the words she spoke to me. They were very, very precious to me, and the sweetness has not died out of them, though she who uttered them is dust.

"I gave her the flowers, and she held them to her heart, and encouraged me to sit with her later than usual. Two or three times in the midst of our conversation, she asked me to go to Master Christian's room to see if he was asleep, and when I told her he was sleeping beautifully, and that he looked like an angel, she smiled, and thanked me.

"He will grow into a noble man,' she said, 'and will, I trust, think of me with tenderness. I often look forward and wonder what his life will be.'

"A happy one, I am sure,' I said.

"I pray that it may be so, and that he will meet with a woman who will truly and faithfully love him.'

"Then she asked me if there was a light in her husband's study, and going out into the balcony to look, I said there was, and said, moreover, that my master often sat up the whole night through, reading and studying.

"You have been in his service a long time, Denise,' said my lady.

"Yes, my lady. I was born in this house, and my mother lived and died here.'

"Was your master always a student, Denise?'

"Always, my lady. Even when he was a boy he would shut himself up with his books. He is not like other men. From his youngest days we used to speak of him with wonder.'

"He is very learned,' said my lady. 'How shall one be forgiven for breaking up his life?'

"Ah, my lady,' I said, 'if I dared to speak!'

"Speak freely, Denise!'

"And then I described to her what a favourite my master was when he was a lad, and how everybody admired him, although he held himself aloof from people. I spoke of his gentleness, of his kindness, of his goodness to the poor, whom he used to visit and help in secret. I told her that never did woman have a more faithful and devoted lover than my master was to her, nor a man with a nobler heart, nor one who stood more highly in the world's esteem.

"She listened in silence, and did not chide me for my boldness, and when I was done, she said she would retire to rest. But she was so weak that she could scarcely rise from her chair.

"I had best remain with you tonight, my lady,' I said; 'you may need my services.'

"It is not necessary," she said; 'I shall require nothing, and I shall be better tomorrow.'

"I considered it my duty to make my master acquainted with his wife's condition, but I did not tell him of her intention to ask him to come to her tomorrow for fear that she should alter her mind. There had been disappointment and vexation enough in the house, and I would not add to it.

"I could not rest, I was so anxious about my lady, and an hour after I was abed, I rose and dressed myself and went to her room. She was on her knees, praying by the bedside of her child, and I stole softly away without disturbing her.

"Again, later in the night, I went to her room. She was sleeping calmly, but her breathing was so light that I could scarcely hear it. In the morning I helped her to dress, and afterwards assisted her to her favourite seat by the window.

"Master Christian was already up and about, and shortly after his mother was dressed he came in loaded with flowers, to make the room look beautiful, he said, on this happy day.

"It was a day he was never to forget."

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE LAST MEETING BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE

"The morning passed, and my lady made no sign. Master Christian, flitting restlessly in and out and about the room, waited impatiently for his mother's instructions to bring her husband to her. I offered her food, but she could not eat it. On the previous day the doctor, who regularly attended her, had said that his services were required at a great distance from the villa, and that he should not be able to visit my lady on the morrow. She had replied:

"Do not trouble, doctor; you can do nothing for me.'

"And, indeed, there appeared to be no special necessity for his presence. My lady was not in pain; she looked happy and contented. But she was so quiet, so very, very quiet! Not a word of complaint or suffering, not a moan, not a sigh. Why, therefore, did my heart sink as I gazed at her?

"At length Master Christian was compelled to speak; he could no longer control his impatience.

"Mamma, do you like the way I have arranged the flowers? The room looks pretty, does it not?'

"Yes, my child.'

"I wanted it to look very bright today. So did you, did you not, mamma? Papa will be pleased when he comes.'

"I hope so, my dear.'

"And I shall tell him that it is not so every day, and that it is done for him. Shall I go for him now?'

"Presently, my dear. Wait yet a little while.'

"But, mamma, it was to be today, you know, and it is nearly afternoon. Just look at the clock, mamma, it is nearly two Ah, but you are tired, and I am worrying you! Now I will sit quite still, and when the clock strikes two, you shall tell me to go for papa. Say yes, or look it, mamma.'



"Yes, my dear, at two o'clock you shall go. Denise will accompany you, for perhaps, Christian, your papa will think that the message comes from your affectionate heart, and not from me.'

"That,' said Master Christian,' is because I have tried to bring papa to you before. But I did it out of love, mamma.'

"I know, my dear, I know. If, when you were a little baby, and could not speak or think of things, I had reflected, it might all have been different. Perhaps I have been to blame.'

"No, mamma, you shall not say that; I will not let you say that. You can't do anything wrong, and papa can't do anything wrong. Now I shall be quite still, and watch the clock, and I will not say another word till it strikes.'

"He sat, as he had promised, quite still, with his eyes fixed on the clock, and I saw by the motion of his lips that he was counting the seconds. Slowly, oh, so slowly, the hands moved round till they reached the hour, and then the silver chimes were heard. First, the four divisions of the hour, then the hour itself. One, Two. In my ears it was like the chapel bell calling the people to prayer.

"Now, mamma!' cried Master Christian, starting up.

"She took his pretty face between her hands, and drew it close to hers. She kissed his lips and his forehead, and then her hands fell to her side.

"May I go now, mamma?'

"He saw in her eyes that she was willing he should bring his father, and he embraced her joyfully, and ran out of the room crying:

"Come, Denise, come! Papa, papa!'

"He did not wait for me, and when I arrived at the study door, the father and son were standing together, and Master Christian was trying to pull my master along.

"This little fellow here,' said my master, striving to speak cheerfully, but his lips trembled, and his voice was husky, 'has a strong imagination, and his heart is so full of love that it runs away with his tongue.'

"It does not, papa, it does not,' cried Master Christian very earnestly. 'And it is not imagination. Mamma wants you to come and love her.'

"My master turned his enquiring eyes to my face.

"My lady wishes you to come to her, sir,' I said simply.

"I knew that the fewer words I spoke at such a time the better it would be.

"He did not question me. He was satisfied that I spoke the truth.

"His agitation was great, and he walked a few steps from me, holding Master Christian by the hand, and then stood still for quite a minute. Then he stooped and kissed his son, and suffered himself to be led to my lady's room.

"I followed them at a little distance, and remained outside my lady's room, while they entered and closed the door behind them. It was not right that any eyes but theirs should witness so sacred a meeting; but though I denied myself the pleasure of being present, my heart was in my ears. It was proper that I should be within call. In my lady's weak state, my services might be required.

"From where I stood, I heard Master Christian's eager, happy voice:

"Mamma, mamma here is papa! He is come at last, mamma! Speak to him, and love him, as I do! Papa, put your arms around mamma's neck, and kiss her.'

"Then all was quiet so quiet, so quiet! Not a sound, not a breath. Ah, Holy Mother! I can hear the silence now: I can feel it about me! It was in this very room, and my lady was sitting in the chair in which you are seated.

"Suddenly the silence was broken. My master was calling loudly for me.

"Denise Denise! Where are you? Come quickly, for God's sake!'

"Before the words were out of his lips, I was in the room. My master was looking wildly upon his wife and child. The lad, with his arms about his mother, was kissing her passionately, and crying over her.

"Mamma, mamma! why do you not speak? Here is papa waiting for you. Oh, mamma, say only one word!'

"Is it true,' my master whispered to me, 'that your lady sent you for me?'

"It is true, sir,' I replied in a low tone.

"What, then, is the meaning of this?' he asked, still in the same unnatural whisper. 'I have spoken to her she will not answer me. She will not even look at me!'

"A sudden fear smote my heart. I stepped softly to my lady's side. I gently unwound Master Christian's arms from his mother's neck. I took her hand in mine, and pressed it. The pressure was not returned. Her fingers, though still warm, were motionless.

"What is it, Denise?' my master asked hoarsely. 'The truth the truth!'

"He read the answer in my eyes. We were gazing on the face of a dead woman!

"Yes, she was dead, and no word had been exchanged between them no look of affection no token of forgiveness. How truly, how prophetically, had she spoken to her husband in their last interview on this spot, eight years before! 'After this night I will never open my lips to you, nor, willingly, will I ever again listen to your voice!'

"From that hour to this he had never heard the sound of her voice, and now that, after their long agony for there is no doubt that his sufferings were as great as hers she had summoned him to her, she was dead! Ah, if she had only lived to say:

"Mine was the fault; it was not only I who was betrayed; let there be peace and forgiveness between us!"

"Did she know, when she called him to her, that he would look upon her dead face? Could she so measure her moments upon earth as to be certain that her heart would cease to beat as he entered the room at her bidding? No, it could not have been, for this premeditation would have proclaimed her capable of vindictive passion. She was full of tender feeling and sweet compassion, and the influence of her child must have softened her heart towards the man who had loved and married her, and had done her no wrong.

"That she knew she was dying was certain, and she was willing nay more than willing, wishful to forgive and to ask forgiveness as she stood upon the brink of another world. The sight of his worn and wasted face may have shocked her and caused her sudden death. But it remained a mystery whether she had seen him whether her spirit had not taken flight before her husband presented himself to her. It was a question none could answer.

"I am aware that there are people who would say that my lady deliberately designed this last bitter blow to her husband. My master did not think so. When the first shock of his grief was spent, his face expressed nothing but sorrow and compassion. He kissed her once on her forehead, not on her lips and after her eyes were closed and she lay, white and beautiful, upon her bed, he sat by her side the whole of the day and night for a great part of the time with Master Christian in his arms.

"There were those in the villa who declared that on the night of her death the white shadow of my lady was seen gliding about the grounds, and from that day the place was supposed to be haunted. For my own part I knew that these were foolish fancies, but you cannot reason people out of them.

"The next day my master made preparations for the funeral. His strange manner of conducting it strengthened the superstition. He would not have any of his old friends at the funeral, although many wrote to him. Only himself and Master Christian and the servants followed my lady to her grave. He would not allow any black crape to be worn, and all the female servants of the house were dressed in white.

"It caused a great deal of talk, a good many people saying that it was a sinful proceeding on the part of my master, and that it was a sign of joy at his wife's death. They must have been blind to the grief in his face so plainly written there that the tears came to my eyes as I looked at it when they uttered this slander. And yet, if the truth were told, if it were deeply searched for among the ashes in his heart, it is not unlikely that my master was sorrowfully grateful that his wife's martyrdom was at an end. For her sake, not for his own, did he experience this sad feeling of gratitude. It was entirely in accordance with his stern sense of justice in the exercise of which he was least likely to spare himself of all people in the world that, while he was bowed down to the earth in grief, he should be glad that his wife was dead.

"All kinds of rumours were afloat concerning the house and the family. The gossips declared that on certain nights the grounds were filled with white shadows, mournfully following each other in a long funeral train. That is how the villa grew to be called The House of Shadows.

"It was like a tomb. Not a person was permitted to pass the gates. Not a servant could be prevailed upon to stop. All of them left, with the exception of Martin and myself, and my daughter, Dionetta's mother. Dionetta was not born at the time. We were glad to take Fritz the Fool into the place, to run of errands and do odd jobs. He was a young lad then, an orphan, and has been hanging about ever since. But for all the good he is, he might as well be at the other end of the world.

"The rumours spread into distant quarters, and one day a priest, who had travelled scores of miles for the purpose of seeing my master, presented himself at the gates, which were always kept locked by my master's orders. I asked the priest what he wanted, and he said he must speak to Mr. Almer. I told him that no person was admitted, and that my master would see none, but he insisted that I should give his errand. I did so, and my master accompanied me to the gates.

"'You have received your answer from my servant,' said my master. 'Why do you persist in your attempts to force yourself upon me?'

"'My errand is a solemn one,' said the priest; 'I am bidden by Heaven to come to you.'

"My master smiled scornfully. 'What deeds in my life,' he said, 'I shall be called upon to answer for before a divine tribunal, concern me, and me only. Were you an officer of justice you should be admitted; but you are a priest, and I do not need you. I am my own priest. Begone.'

"He was importunate, and was not so easily got rid of. Day after day, for two weeks, he made his appearance at the gates, but he could not obtain admittance, and at length he was compelled to forego his mission, whatever it might have been, and to leave without having any further speech with my master.

"Soon after he left, my master took Master Christian to school, at a great distance from the village, and returning alone, resumed his solitary habits.

"How well do I remember the evening on which he desired me not to disturb him on any account whatever, and to come to his study at four o'clock on the afternoon of the following day. At that hour, I knocked at the door, and received no answer. I knocked several times, and, becoming alarmed, tried the handle of the door. It was unlocked, and I stepped into the study, and said:

"'It is I, sir, Denise; you bade me come at this hour.'

"I spoke to deaf ears. On the floor lay my master stone dead!

"He had not killed himself; he died a natural death, and must have been forewarned that his moments on earth were numbered.

"That is all I have to tell, my lady."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE ARRIVAL OF CHRISTIAN ALMER

"And you have really told it very well, Mother Denise," said the Advocate's wife; "with such sentiment, and in such beautiful language! It is a great talent: I don't know when I have been so interested. Why, in some parts you actually gave me the creeps! And here is Dionetta, as white as a lily. What a comfort it must have been to the poor lady to have had a good soul like you about her! If such a misfortune happened to me, I should like to have just such a servant as you were to her."

"Heaven forbid, my lady," said Mother Denise, raising her hands, "that such an unhappy lot should be yours!"

"Well, to tell you the truth," said Adelaide, with a bright smile, "I do not think it at all likely to happen. Of course, there is no telling what one might have to go through. Men are such strange creatures, and lead such strange lives! They may do anything absolutely anything! fight, gamble, make love without the least sincerity, deceive poor women and forsake them yes, they may do all that, and the world will smile indulgently upon them. But if one of us, Mother Denise, makes the slightest trip, dear me! what a fuss is made about it how shocked everybody is! A perfect carnival for the scandal mongers! 'Isn't it altogether too dreadful.' 'Did you ever hear of such a thing?' 'Would you have believed it of her?' That is what is said by all sorts of people. But if I happened to be treated badly I should not submit to it tamely nor between you and me, Mother Denise, in my opinion, did the lady whose story you have just related."

"Everything occurred," said Mother Denise stiffly, "exactly as I have described it."

"With a small allowance," said Adelaide archly, "for exaggeration, and with here and there a chapter left out. Come, you must admit that!"

"I have omitted nothing, my lady. I am angry with myself for having told so much. I doubt whether I have not done wrong."

"Mr. Christian Almer, whom I expect every minute" and Adelaide looked at her watch "would have been seriously annoyed with you if you had not satisfied my curiosity. Where is the harm? To be living here, with such an interesting tale untold, would have been inexcusable, perfectly inexcusable. But I am certain that you have purposely passed over more than one chapter, and I admire you for it. It is highly to your credit not to have told all you know, though it could hurt no one at this distance of time."

"What do you think I have concealed, my lady?"

"There was a certain M. Gabriel," said Adelaide, "who played a most important part in the story—a good many people would say, the most important part. If it had not been for him, there would have been no story to tell worth the hearing; there would have been no quarrel between husband and wife, and the foolish young lady would not have died, and I should not be here, listening to her story, and ready to cry my eyes out in pity for her. M. Gabriel must have been a very handsome young fellow, or there would not have been such a fuss made about him. There! I declare you have never even given me a description of him. Of course he was handsome."

She was full of vivacity, and as she leaned forward towards the old housekeeper, it appeared as if, in her estimation, nothing connected with the story she had heard was of so much importance as this question, which she repeated anxiously, "Tell me, Mother Denise, was he handsome?"

"He was exceedingly good-looking," Mother Denise was constrained to reply, "but not so distinguished in his bearing as my unhappy master."

"Tall?"

"Yes, tall, my lady."

"Dark or fair? But I think you gave me the impression that he was dark."

"Yes, my lady, he was dark," replied Mother Denise, coldly, more and more displeased at the frivolity of the questions.

"And young, of course—much younger than Mr. Almer?"

"Much younger, my lady."

"There would be no sense in the matter otherwise; anyone might guess that he was young and handsome and fascinating. Well, as I was about to say—I hope you will forgive me for flying off as I do; my head gets so full of ideas that they tumble over one another—all at once this M. Gabriel drops clean out of the story, and we hear nothing more of him. If there is one thing more inexplicable than another in the affair, it is that nothing more should be heard of M. Gabriel."

"We live out of the gay world, my lady; far removed from it, I am happy to think. It is not at all strange that in this quiet village we should not know what became of him."

"That is assuming that M. Gabriel went back into the gay world, as you call it, which is not such a bad place, I assure you, Mother Denise."

"He could not have stopped in the village, my lady, without its being known."

"Probably not; but, you dear old soul!" said Adelaide, her manner becoming more animated as that of Mother Denise became more frigid, "you dear old soul, they always come back! When lovers are dismissed, as M. Gabriel was, they always come back. They think they never will they vow they never will but they cannot help themselves. They are not their own masters. It is the story of the moth and the candle over again."

"You mean, my lady," said Mother Denise, very gravely, "that M. Gabriel returned to the villa."

"That is my meaning exactly. What else could he do?"

"I will not say whether I am glad or sorry to disappoint you, my lady, but M. Gabriel, after the summerhouse was barred up, never made his appearance again in the village."

"Of course, under the circumstances, he could not show himself to everybody. It was necessary that he should be cautious. He had to come quietly secretly, if you like."

"He never came, my lady," said Mother Denise, with determination.

"But he wrote, and sent his letters by a confidential messenger; he did that at least."

"I told you, my lady, that while my poor mistress lived in these rooms she never received or wrote a letter."

"If that is so, his letters to her must have been intercepted."

"There were no letters," said Mother Denise, stubbornly.

"There were," said Adelaide, smiling a reproof to Mother Denise. "I know the ways of men better than you do."

"By whom, my lady, do you suppose these imaginary letters were intercepted?"



"By her husband, of course, you dear, simple soul!"

"Mr. Almer could not have been guilty of such an act."

The Advocate's wife gazed admiringly at the housekeeper. "Dionetta," she exclaimed, "never be tempted to betray your mistress's secrets; take pattern by your grandmother."

"She might do worse, my lady," said Mother Denise, still unbending.

"Indeed she might. I am thinking of something. On the night you were aroused from your sleep, and heard the sound of a man falling to the ground"

"I only fancied it was a man, my lady; we never learnt the truth."

"It was a man, and he climbed the wall. And he chose a dark and stormy night for his adventure. He was a brave fellow. I quite admire him."

"Admire a thief!" exclaimed Mother Denise, in horror.

"My dear old soul, you must know it was not a thief. The house was not robbed, was it?"

"No, my lady, nothing was taken; but what is the use of speaking of it?"

"When once I get an idea into my head," said Adelaide, "it carries me along, whether I like it or not. So, thensome time after you heard a man falling or jumping from the wall, you heard the sound of someone walking in the paths outside. He was fearful of disturbing anyone in the house, and he trod very, very softly. I should have done just the same. Now can't you guess the name of that man?"

"No, my lady, it was never discovered. He was a villain, whoever he was, to poison our dogs."

"That was a small matter. What is the life of a dogof a thousand dogswhen a man is in love?"

"My lady!" cried Mother Denise. "What is it you are saying?"

"Nothing will deter him," continued Adelaide, with an intense enjoyment of the old woman's uneasiness, "nothing will frighten him, if he is brave and earnest, as M. Gabriel was. You dear old soul, the man you heard in the grounds that night was M. Gabriel, and

he came to see your mistress perhaps to carry her off! This window is not very high; I could almost jump from it myself."

Mother Denise pressed her hand to her side, as though to relieve a sudden pain; her face was white with a newly born apprehension.

"Do you really believe, my lady," she asked in trembling tones, "that M. Gabriel would have dared to enter the grounds in the dead of night, like a thief, after what had occurred?"

"I certainly believe it; it was the daring of a lover, not of a thief. Were any traces of blood discovered in the grounds?"

"None were discovered; but if blood was spilt, the rain would have washed it away."

"Or it could have been wiped away in the dark night!"

"Is it possible," said Mother Denise under her breath, "that you can be right, and that my master and M. Gabriel met on that night!"

"The most probable occurrence in the world," said Adelaide, with a pleasant smile. "What should have made your old master so anxious that you should not speak of the sounds you heard? He had a motive, depend upon it."

Mother Denise, who had sunk into a chair in great agitation, suddenly rose, and said abruptly:

"My lady, this is very painful to me. Will you allow me to go?"

"Certainly; do not let me detain you a moment. I cannot express to you the obligations you have laid me under by relating the history of this house and family. There is nothing more to do in these rooms, I believe. How very, very pretty they look! We must do everything in our power to make the place pleasant to the young master who is coming. But I think I can promise he will be happy here."

Not even Adelaide's smiles and goodhumour could smooth Mother Denise's temper for the rest of the day.

"Mark my words, Martin," she said to her husband, "something wrong will happen before the Advocate and his fine lady leave the villa. She has put such horrible ideas into

my head! Ah, but I will not think of them; it is treason, rank treason! We shall rue the day she came among us."

"Ha, ha!" chuckled the old man slyly. "You're jealous, Denise, you're jealous! She is the pleasantest lady, and the sweetest spoken, and the most generous, and the handsomest, for twenty miles round. The whole village is in love with her."

"And you as well as the rest, I suppose," snapped Mother Denise.

"I don't say that I don't say that," piped Martin, with a childish laugh. "Never kiss and tell, Denise, never kiss and tell! If I was young and straight"

"But you're old and crooked," retorted Mother Denise, "and your mind's going, if it hasn't gone already. You grow sillier and sillier every day."

A reproach the old man received with gleeful laughs and tiresome coughs. His worship of the beautiful lady was not to be lightly disturbed.

"The sweetest and the handsomest!" he chuckled, as he hobbled away, at the rate of half a mile an hour. "I'd walk twenty mile to serve hertwenty miletwenty mile!"

"And this is actually the room," said Adelaide, walking about it, "in which that poor lady spent so many unhappy years! Her prison! Her grave! Dionetta, my pretty one, when the chance of happiness is offered to you, do not throw it away. Life is short. Enjoy it. A great many people moralise and preach, but if you were to see what they do, and put it in by the side of what they say, you would understand what fools those people must be who believe in their moralising and preaching. The persecuted lady whose story your grandmother has told us what happiness did she enjoy in her life? None. Do you know why, Dionetta? Because it was life without love. Love is life's sunshine. Better to be dead than to live without it! Hark! Is not that a carriage driving up at the gates?"

She ran swiftly from the room, down the stairs, into the grounds. The gates were thrown open. A young man, just alighted, came towards her. She ran forward to meet him, with outstretched hands, with face beaming with joy. He took her hands in his.

"Welcome, Mr. Almer," she said aloud, so that those around her could hear her. "You have had a pleasant journey, I hope." And then, in a whisper, "Christian!"

"Adelaide!" he said, in a tone as low as hers.

"Now I am the happiest woman!" she murmured. "It is an eternity since I saw you. How could you have kept away from me so long?"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### LAWYER AND PRIEST

It happened that certain persons had selected this evening as a suitable occasion for a friendly visit to the House of White Shadows; Jacob Hartrich, the banker, was one of these. The banker was accompanied by his wife, a handsome and dignified woman, and by his two daughters, whose personal attractions, enhanced by their father's wealth and their consequent expectations, would have created a sensation in fashionable circles. Although in his religious observances Jacob Hartrich was by no means orthodox, he did not consider himself less a true Jew on that account. It is recognised by the most intelligent and liberalminded of his race in the civilised countries of the world that the carryingout of the Mosaic law in its integrity would not only debar them from social relations, but would check their social advancement. It is a consequence of the recognition of this undoubted fact that the severe ordinances of the Jewish religion should become relaxed in their fulfilment. Jacob Hartrich was a member of this band of reformers, and though his conscience occasionally gave him a twinge, he was none the less devoted, in a curiously jealous and illogical spirit, to the faith of his forefathers, to which he clung with the greater tenacity because his daily habits compelled him to act, to some extent, in antagonism with the decrees they had laid down.

Master Pierre Lamont was also at the villa. His bodily ailments were more severe than usual, and the jolting over the rough roads, as he was drawn from his house in his handcarriage, had caused him excruciating suffering. He bore it with grins and grimaces, scorning to give pain an open triumph over him. Fritz was not by his side to amuse him with his humour; the Fool was at the court, on this last day of Gautran's trial, as he had been on every previous day, hastening thence every evening to Pierre Lamont, to give him an account of the day's proceedings.

Father Capel was there a simple and learned ecclesiastic, with a smile and a pleasant greeting for old and young, for rich and poor alike. A benevolent, sweetnatured man, who, when trouble came to his door, received it with cheerful resignation; universally beloved; a man whose course through life was strewn with flowers of charity and kindness.

The visit of these and other guests was unexpected by Adelaide, and she inwardly resented the interruption to a contemplated quiet evening with Christian Almer; but outwardly she was all affability.

The principal topic of conversation was the trial of Gautran, and Pierre Lamont was enthusiastic on the theme.

"The trial will end this evening," he said, "and intellect will triumph."

"Truth, I trust, will triumph," said Jacob Hartrich, gravely.

"Intellect is truth's best champion," said Pierre Lamont. "But some mortals believe themselves to be omniscient, and set up a standard of truth which is independent of proof. I understood that you were to have been on the jury at the trial."

"I was excused," said Jacob Hartrich, "on the ground that I had already formed so strong a view of the guilt of the prisoner that no testimony could affect it."

"Decidedly," observed Pierre Lamont, "an unfit frame of mind to take part in a judicial inquiry of great difficulty. For my own part, I would willingly have given a year of my life, which cannot have too many years to run, to have been able to be in Geneva these last few days. It will be long before another trial so celebrated will take place in our courts."

"I am happy to think so."

"It has always been a puzzle to me," said Adelaide, whose feelings towards Pierre Lamont were of the most contradictory character now inclining her to be exceedingly partial to him, now to detest him "how such vulgar cases can excite the interest they do."

"It is surprising," was Pierre Lamont's comment, "that the wife of an Advocate so celebrated should express such an opinion."

"There are stranger things than that in the world, Master Lamont."

"Truly, truly," said Pierre Lamont, regarding her with curiosity; "but cannot you understand how even these vulgar cases become, at least for a time, great and grand when the highest qualities of the mind are engaged in unravelling the threads which bind them?"

"No, I cannot understand it," she replied with an amiable smile. "I believe that you lawyers are only happy when people are murdering and robbing each other."

"My friend the Advocate," said Pierre Lamont, bending gallantly, an exertion which sent a twinge of pain through his body, "is at least happy in one other respect that of being the

husband of a lady whom none can see without admiring if I were a younger man I should say without loving."

"Pierre Lamont," said Jacob Hartrich, "gives us here a proof that love and law can go hand in hand."

"Nay," said Pierre Lamont, whose eyes and mind were industriously studying the face of his beautiful hostess, "such proof from me is not needed. The Advocate has supplied it, and words cannot strengthen the case."

And he waved his hand courteously towards Adelaide.

These compliments were not wasted upon her, and Pierre Lamont laughed secretly as he observed their effect.

"You are worth studying, fair dame," he thought, "with your smiling face, and your heart of vanity, and your lack of sympathy with your husband's triumphs. If not with his triumphs, then not with him! Feeling you must have, though it is born of selfishness. Ah! the curtain is drawn aside. Which one, which one, you beautiful animal?" His eyes travelled from one to the other in the room, until they fell upon Christian Almer, whose eyes at that moment met those of Adelaide. "Ah!" and he drew a deep breath of enjoyment. "Are you the favoured one, my master of this House of Shadows! Then we must take you into the game, for it cannot be played without you."

The old lawyer was in his element, probing character and motive, and submitting them to mental analysis. Physically he was helpless amidst the animated life around him; curled up in his invalid chair he was dependent for every movement upon his fellowcreatures; despite his intellect, he was at the mercy of a hind; but he was nevertheless the strongest man in all that throng, the man most to be feared by those who had anything to conceal, any secret which it behoved them to hide from the knowledge of men.

"How such vulgar cases," he said aloud, to the astonishment of the Advocate's wife, who deemed the subject dismissed, "can excite the interest they do! It surprises you. But there is not one of these cases which does not contain elements of human sympathy and affinity with ourselves. This very case of Gautran what is its leading feature? Love the theme of minstrel and poet, the sentiment without which human and divine affairs would be plunged into darkness. Crimes for which Gautran is being tried are caused by the human passions and emotions which direct our own movements. The balance in our favour is so heavy when our desires and wishes clash with the desires and wishes of

other men, that we easily find justification for our misdeeds. Father Capel is listening to me with more than ordinary attention. He perceives the justice of my argument."

"We travel by different roads," said Father Capel. "You do not take into account the prompting of evil spirits, ever on the alert to promote discord and instigate to crime. It is that consideration which makes me tolerant of human error, which makes me pity it, which makes me forgive it."

"I dispute your spiritual basis. All motive for crime springs from within ourselves."

"Nay, nay," gently remonstrated Father Capel.

"Pardon me for restraining you. I was about to say that not only does all motive for human crime spring from within ourselves, but all motive for human goodness as well. If your thesis that evil spirits prompt us to crime is correct, it must be equally correct that good spirits prompt us to deeds of mercy, and charity, and kindness. Then there is no merit in performing a good action. You rob life of its grace, and you virtually declare that it is an injustice to punish a man for murdering his fellowcreature. Plainly stated, you establish the doctrine of irresponsibility. I will not do you the injustice of believing that you are in earnest. Your tolerance of human error, and your pity and forgiveness for it, spring from natural kindliness, as my tolerance of it, and my lack of pity and forgiveness for it, spring from a natural hardness of heart, begot of much study of the weakness, perverseness, and selfishness of my species. In the rank soil of these imperfections grows that wondrous, necessary tree known by the name of Law, whose widespreading branches at once smite and protect. You may thank this tree for preserving to some extent the decencies of society."

"Well expressed, Pierre Lamont," said Jacob Hartrich approvingly. "I regret that the Advocate is not present to listen to your eloquence."

"Ah," said Pierre Lamont, with a scarcely perceptible sneer, "does your endorsement spring from judgment or selfinterest?"

"You strike both friend and foe," said Father Capel, with much gentleness. "It is as dangerous to agree with you as to dissent from you. But in your extravagant laudation of the profession of which you are a representative you lose sight of a mightier engine than Law, towering far above it in usefulness, and as a protection, no less than a solace to mankind. Without Religion, Law would be powerless, and the world a world of wild beasts. It softens, humanizes"



"Invents," sneered Pierre Lamont, with undisguised contempt, "fables which sober reason rejects."

"If you will have it so, yes. Fables to divert men's minds from sordid materialism into purer channels. Be thankful for Religion if you practise it not. In the Sabbath's holy peace, in the hush and calm of one day out of the turbulent seven, in the influences which touch you closely, though you do not acknowledge them, in the restraint imposed by fear, in the charitable feelings inspired by love, in the unseen spirit which softens and subdues, in the yearning hope which chastens grief when one dear to you is lost, lie the safeguard of your days and much of the happiness you enjoy. So much for your body. For your soul, I will pray tonight."

"Father Capel," said Pierre Lamont in a voice of honey, "if all priests were like you, I would wear a hairshirt tomorrow."

"What need, my son," asked Father Capel, "if you have a conscience?"

"Let me pay for my sins," said Pierre Lamont, handing his purse to the priest.

Father Capel took a few francs from the purse. "For the poor," he said. "In their name I bless you!"

"The priest has the best of it," said Adelaide to Christian Almer. "I hate these dry arguments! It is altogether too bad that I should be called upon to entertain a set of musty old men. How much happier we should be, we two alone, even in the mountains where you have been hiding yourself from me!"

"You are in better health and spirits," said Jacob Hartrich, drawing Almer aside, "than when I last saw you. The mountain air has done you good. It is strange to see you in the old house; I thought it would never be opened again to receive guests."

"It is many years since we were together under this roof," said Christian Almer thoughtfully.

"You were so young at the time," rejoined the banker, "that you can scarcely have a remembrance of it."

"My remembrance is very keen. I could have been scarcely six years of age, and we had no visitors. I remember that my curiosity was excited because you were admitted."

"I came on business," said Jacob Hartrich, and then, unwilling to revive the sad reminiscences of the young man's childhood, he said abruptly: "Almer, you should marry." His eyes wandered to his two comely daughters.

"What is that you are saying?" interposed the Advocate's wife; "that Mr. Almer should marry? If I were a man how I wish I were! nothing, nothing in the world would tempt me to marry. I would live a life without chain or shackle."

"So, so, my fair dame," thought Pierre Lamont, who had overheard this remark. "Bright as you appear, there is a skeleton in your cupboard. Chains and shackles! But you are sufficiently selfwilled to throw these off." And he said aloud: "Can you ascertain for me if Fritz the Fool has returned from Geneva?"

"Certainly," replied Adelaide, and Dionetta being in the room, she sent her out to inquire.

"If he has returned," said Pierre Lamont, "the trial is over. I miss the fool's nightly report of the proceedings, which he has given me regularly since the commencement of the inquiry."

"If the trial is over," said Christian Almer, "the Advocate should be here."

"You need not expect him so soon," said Pierre Lamont; "after such exertion as he has gone through, an hour's solitude is imperative. Besides, Fritz can travel faster than our slowgoing horses; he is as fleet as a hare."

"A favourite of yours, evidently."

"I have the highest respect for him. This particular fool is the wisest fool in my acquaintance."

Dionetta entered the room with Fritz at her heels.

"Well, Fritz," called out Pierre Lamont, "is the trial over?"

"Yes, Master Lamont, and we're ready for the next."

"The verdict, Fritz, the verdict?" eagerly inquired Pierre Lamont, and everybody in the room listened anxiously for the reply.

"If I were a bandylegged man," said Fritz, ignoring the question, "I would hire some scoundrel to do a deed, so that you might be on one side and my lord the Advocate on the other. Then we should witness a fine battle of brains."

"Come, Fritz the verdict!" repeated Pierre Lamont impatiently.

"On second thoughts," said Fritz quietly, "you would be no match for the greatest lawyer living. I would not have you on my side. It is as well that your pleading days are ended."

"No fooling, Fritz. The verdict; Acquitted?"

"What else? Washed white as driven snow."

"I knew it would be so," cried the old lawyer triumphantly. "How was it received?"

"The town is mad about it. The women are furious, and the men thunderstruck. You should have heard the speech! Such a thing was never known. Men's minds were twisted inside out, and the jury were convinced against their convictions. Why, Master Lamont, even Gautran himself for a few minutes believed himself to be innocent!"

"Enough," said Christian Almer sternly. "Leave the room."

Fritz darted a sharp look at the newly returned master, and with a low bow quitted the apartment. The next moment the Advocate made his appearance, and all eyes were turned towards him.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE WHITE SHADOW

He entered the room with a cloud upon his face. Gautran's horrible confession had deeply moved him, and, almost for the first time in his life, he found himself at fault. His heart was heavy, and his mind was troubled; but he had never yet lost his power of selfcontrol, and the moment he saw his guests the mask fell over his features, and they assumed their usual tranquil expression. He greeted one and another with calmness and courtesy, leaving his wife and Christian Almer to the last.

"I am happy to tell you, Adelaide," he said, "that the trial is over."

"Oh, we have already had the news," she said coldly. "Fool Fritz has given us a glowing account of it, and the excitement the verdict created."

"Did it create excitement?" he asked. "I was not aware of it."

"I take no interest in such cases, as you are aware," she rejoined. "You knew the man was innocent, or you would not have defended him. It is a pity the monster is set free."

"Last, but not least," said the Advocate, turning to Christian Almer, and cordially pressing his hand. "Welcome, and again welcome! You have come to stay?"

Adelaide answered for him:

"Certainly he has: I have his promise."

"That is well," said the Advocate. "I am glad to see you looking so bright, Christian."

"You have not derived much benefit from your holiday," said Christian Almer, gazing at the Advocate's pale face. "Was it wise to take upon yourself the weight of so harassing a trial?"

"Do we always do what is wise?" asked the Advocate, with a smile in which there was no light.

"But seldom, I should say," replied Almer. "I once had great faith in the power of Will; but I am beginning to believe that we are as completely slaves to independent forces as

feathers in a fierce wind: driven this way or that in spite of ourselves. Not inward, but outward magnetism rules us. Perhaps the best plan is to submit without a struggle."

"Of course it is," said Adelaide with a bright look, "if it is pleasant to submit. It is ridiculous to make one's head ache over things. I can teach you, in a word, a wiser lesson than either of you have ever learnt."

"What is that word, Adelaide?" asked the Advocate.

"Enjoy," she replied.

"A butterfly's philosophy. What say you, Christian? Shall we follow the teaching of this Solon in petticoats?"

"May I join you?" said Pierre Lamont, who had caused himself to be drawn to this group. "My infirmities make me a privileged person, and unless I thrust myself forward, I might be left to languish like a decrepit spider in a ruined web."

"Illnatured people," remarked Adelaide, "might say that your figure of speech is a dangerous one for a lawyer to employ."

"Fairest of dames," said Pierre Lamont, "your arrows are sugartipped; there is no poison in them. Use me as your target, I beg. You put new life into this old frame."

"The old school can teach the new," said Christian Almer. "You should open a class of gallantry, Master Lamont."

"I! with my useless limbs! You mock me!"

"He will not allow me to be angry with him," said Adelaide, smiling on the lawyer.

Then Pierre Lamont drew the Advocate into a conversation on the trial which the Advocate would gladly have avoided, could he have done so without being considered guilty of a breach of courtesy. But Pierre Lamont was not a man to be denied, and the Advocate was fain to answer the questions put to him until the old lawyer was acquainted with every detail of the line of defence.

"Excellent! excellent!" he exclaimed. "A masterstroke! You do not share my enthusiasm," he said, addressing Jacob Hartrich, who had stood silently by, listening to the conversation. "You have no understanding of the intense, the fierce delight of such a battle and such a victory."

"The last word is not spoken here on earth," said Jacob Hartrich. "There is a higher tribunal."

"Well said, my son," said Father Capel.

"Son!" said Pierre Lamont to the banker, with a little scornful laugh. "Resent the familiarity, man of another faith."

"Better any faith than none," warmly remarked Jacob Hartrich, cordially taking the hand which Father Capel held out to him.

"Good! good! good!" cried Pierre Lamont. "I stand renounced by church and synagogue."

"You are uncharitable only to yourself," said Father Capel. "I, for one, will not take you at your word."

Pierre Lamont lowered his eyes. "You teach me humility," he said.

"Profit by it," rejoined Father Capel.

"You formed the opinion that Gautran was guilty," said Pierre Lamont to the banker. "Upon what evidence?"

"Inward conviction," briefly replied Jacob Hartrich.

"You, at least," said Pierre Lamont, turning his wily face to Father Capel, "although you look at human affairs through Divine light, have a respect for the law."

"Undoubtedly," was the reply.

"But this man of finance," said Pierre Lamont, "would destroy its very fabric when it clashes with his inward conviction. Argue with him, and your words fall against a steel wall, impenetrable to logic, reason, natural deduction, and even common sense and behind this wall lurks a self-sufficient imp which he calls Inward Conviction. Useful enough, nay, necessary, in religion, for it needs no proof. Faith answers for all. Accept, and rest content. I congratulate you, Jacob Hartrich. But does it not occur to you that others, besides yourself, may have inward convictions antagonistic to yours, and that occasionally theirs may be the true conviction and yours the false? Our friend the Advocate, for instance. Do you think it barely possible that he would have undertaken

the defence of Gautran unless he had an inward conviction, formed upon a sure foundation, that the man was innocent of the crime imputed to him?"

It was with some indignation that Jacob Hartrich replied, "That a man of honour would voluntarily come forward as a defender under any conditions than that of the firmest belief in the prisoner's innocence is incredible."

"We agree upon this point I am happy to know, and upon another that in the profession to which I have the honour to belong, there are men whose actions are guided by the highest and finest principles, and whose motives spring from what I conceive to be the most ennobling of all impulse, a desire for justice."

"Who can doubt it?"

"How, then, stands the case as between you and my brother the Advocate? You have an inward conviction of Gautran's guilt the an inward conviction of Gautran's innocence. Up to a certain time you and he are on an equality; your knowledge of the crime is derived from hearsay and newspaper reports. Upon that evidence you rest; you have your business to attend to the value of money, the fluctuations of the Exchanges, the public movements which affect securities, in addition to the anxieties springing from your private transactions. The Advocate cannot afford to depend upon hearsay and the newspapers. It is his business to investigate, to unearth, to bring together the scattered bones and fit them one with another, to reason, to argue, to deduce. As all the powers of your mind are brought to bear upon your business, which is money, so all the powers of his mind are brought to bear upon his, which is Gautran, in connection with the crime of which he stands accused. His inward conviction of the man's innocence is strengthened no less by the facts which come to light than by the presumptive evidence he is enabled by his patience and application to bring forward in favour of his client. You and he are no longer on an equality. He is a man informed, you remain in ignorance. He has dissected the body, and all the arteries of the crime are exposed to his sight and judgment. You merely raise up a picture a dark night, a river, a girl vainly struggling with her fate, a murderer (with veiled face) flying from the spot, or looking with brutal calmness upon his victim. That is the entire extent of your knowledge. You seize a brush you throw light upon the darkness you paint the river and the girl you paint the portrait of the murderer, Gautran. All is clear to you. You have formed your own court of justice, imagination affords the proof, and prejudice is the judge. It is an easy and agreeable task to find the prisoner guilty. You are satisfied. You believe you have fulfilled a duty, whereas you have been but a stumbling block in the path of justice."

"Notwithstanding which," said Jacob Hartrich, who had thoroughly recovered his good humour, "I have as firm a conviction as ever in the guilt of Gautran the woodman."

"Admonish this member of a stiffnecked race, Father Capel," said Pierre Lamont, "and tell him why reason was given to man."

Earnest as the old lawyer was in the discussion, and apparently engaged in it to the exclusion of all other subjects, he had eyes and ears for everything that passed in the room. Retirement from the active practice of his profession had by no means rusted his powers; on the contrary, indeed, for it had developed in him a finer and more subtle capacity of observation. It gave him time, also, to devote himself to matters which, at an earlier period of his life, he would have considered trivial. Thus, when he moved in private circles, freed from larger duties, there lurked in him always a possible danger, and although he would not do mischief for mischief's sake, he was irresistibly drawn in its direction. The quality of his mind was such as to seek out for itself, and unerringly detect, human blemish. He was ready, when it was presented to him, to recognise personal goodness, but while he recognised he did not admire it. The good man was in his eyes a negative character, pithless, uninteresting; his dominant qualities, being on the surface, presented no field for study. He himself, as has already been seen, was not loth to bestow money in charity, but he was destitute of benevolence; his soul never glowed with pity, nor did the sight of suffering touch his heart. While goodness did not attract him, he took no interest in the profligate or dissolute. His magnet was of the Machiavellian type. Cunning, craft, duplicity, guilehere he was at home in his glory. As easy to throw him off the scent as a bloodhound.

Chiefly on this occasion was his attention given to the Advocate's wife. Not a movement, not a gesture, not a varying shade of expression escaped him. Any person, noting his observance of her, would have detected in it nothing but admiration; and to this conclusion Adelaide herselfshe knew when she was admiredwas by no means averse. But his eye was upon her when she was not aware of it.

"Have I not heard of a case," asked a guest of Pierre Lamont, "in which a lawyer defended a murderer, knowing him to be guilty?"

"Yes," said Pierre Lamont, "there was such a case. The murder was a ruthless murder; the lawyer a man of great attainments. His speech to the court was eloquent and thrilling, and in it he declared his solemn belief in the prisoner's innocence, and made an appeal to God to strengthen the declaration. It created a profound impression. But the evidence was conclusive, and the prisoner was found guilty. It then transpired that the accused, in his cell, had confessed to his advocate that he had perpetrated the murder."

"Confessed before his trial?"



"Yes, before the trial."

"What became of the lawyer?"

"He was ruined, socially and professionally. A great career was blighted."

"A deserved punishment," remarked Father Capel.

"Yet it is an open question," said Pierre Lamont, "whether the secrets of the prisoncell should not be held as sacred as those of the confessional."

"Nothing can justify," said Father Capel, "the employment of such an appeal, used to frustrate the ends of justice."

"Then," said Pierre Lamont with malicious emphasis, "you admit the doctrine of responsibility. Your prompting of evil spirits, what becomes of it?"

Father Capel did not have time to reply, for a cry of terror from a visitor gave an unexpected turn to the gossip of the evening, and diverted it into a common channel. The person who had uttered this cry was the youngest daughter of Jacob Hartrich. She had been standing at a window, the heavy curtains of which she had held aside, in an idle moment, to look out upon the grounds, which were wrapped in a pall of deep darkness. Upon the utterance of her terrified scream she had retreated into the room, and was now gazing with affrighted eyes at the curtains, which her loosened hold had allowed to fall over the window. Her mother and sister hurried to her side, and most of the other guests clustered around her. What had occasioned her alarm? When she had sufficiently recovered she gave an explanation of it. She was looking out, without any purpose in her mind, "thinking of nothing," as she expressed it, when, in a distant part of the grounds, there suddenly appeared a bright light, which moved slowly onward, and within the radius of this light, of which it seemed to form a part, she saw distinctly a white figure, like a spirit. The curtains of the window were drawn aside, and all within the room, with the exception of Pierre Lamont, who was left without an audience, peered into the grounds below.

Nothing was to be seen; no glimpse of light or white shadow; no movement but the slight stir of leaf and branch, but the young lady vehemently persisted in her statement, and, questioned more closely, declared that the figure was that of a woman; she had seen her face, her hair, her white robe.

The three persons whom her story most deeply impressed were the Advocate's wife, Christian Almer, and Father Capel. With the Advocate it was a simple delusion of the senses; with Jacob Hartrich, "nerves." Christian Almer and Father Capel went out to search the grounds, and when they returned reported that nothing was to be seen.

During this excitement Pierre Lamont was absolutely unnoticed, and it was not till a groan proceeded from the part of the room where he sat huddled up in the wheeled chair in which he was imprisoned that attention was directed to him. He was evidently in great pain; his features were contracted with the spasms which darted through his limbs.

"It almost masters me," he said to the Advocate, as he laughed and winced, "this physical anguish. I will not allow it to conquer me, but I must humour it. I am tempted to ask you to give me a bed tonight."

"Stop with us by all means," said the Advocate; "the night is too dark, and your house too far, for you to leave while you are suffering."

So it was arranged, and within half an hour all the other guests had taken their departure.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE WATCH ON THE HILL

For more than twenty years the House of White Shadows may be said to have been without a history. Its last eventful chapter ended with the death of Christian Almer's father, the tragic story of whose life has been related by Mother Denise. Then followed a blank dull uniformity of days and months and years, without the occurrence of a single event worthy of record in the annals of the family who had held the estate for four generations. The doors and windows of the villa were but seldom opened, and on those rare occasions only by Mother Denise, who had too strict a regard for the faithful discharge of her duties to allow the costly furniture to fall into decay. Suddenly all this was altered. Light and life reigned again. Startling was the transformation. Within a few short weeks the House of White Shadows had become the centre of a chain of events, in which the affections which sway and the passions which dominate mankind were displayed in all their strangest variety.

At a short distance from the gate, on this dark night, upon the rise of a hill which commanded a view of the villa, sometimes stood and sometimes lay a man in the prime of life. Not a welllooking man, nor a desirable man, and yet one who in his better days might have passed for a gentleman. Even now, with the aid of fine feathers, he might have reached such a height in the judgment of those who were not given to close observation. His feathers at the present time were anything but fine a sad fall, for they have been once such as fine birds wear; no barndoor fowl's, but of the partridge's quality. So that, between the man and his garments, there was something of an affinity. He was tall and fairly presentable, and he bore himself with a certain air which, in the eyes of the vulgar, would have passed for grace. But his swagger spoilt him; and his sensual mouth, which had begot a coarseness from long and unrestrained indulgence, spoilt him; and the blotches on his face spoilt him. His hands were white, and rings would have looked well on them, if rings ever looked well on the hands of a man which may be doubted.

As he stood, or lay, his eyes were for the chief part of his time fixed on the House of White Shadows. Following with precision his line of sight, it would have been discovered that the point which claimed his attention were the windows of the Advocate's study. There was a light in them, but no movement.

"Yet he is there," muttered the man, whose name was John Vanbrugh, "for I see his shadow."

His sight unassisted would not have enabled him to speak with authority upon this, but he held in his hand a fieldglass, and he saw by its aid what would otherwise have been hidden from him.

"His guests have gone," continued John Vanbrugh, "and he has time to attend to me. I have that to sell, Edward, which it is worth your while to purchase, which it is vital you should purchase. Every hour's delay increases its price. It must be near midnight, and still no sign. Well, I can wait. I can wait."

He had no watch to take count of the time, which passed slowly; but he waited patiently nevertheless, until the sound of footsteps, approaching in his direction, diverted his attention. They came nearer, nearer, until this other wanderer of the night was close upon him.

"Who," he thought, "has taken it into his head to come my way? This is no time for honest men to be about."

And then he said aloud for the intruder had paused within a yard of him:

"What particular business brings you here, friend, and why do you not pass on?"

A sigh of intense relief escaped the breast of the newcomer, who was none other than Gautran. With the cuff of his shirt he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and muttered in a grateful tone:

"A man's voice! That is something to be thankful for."

The sound of this muttering, but not the words, reached Vanbrugh's ears.

"Well, friend?" said Vanbrugh, who, being unarmed, felt himself at a disadvantage.

"Well?" repeated Gautran.

"Are you meditating an attack upon me? I am not worth the risk, upon my honour. If you are poor, behold in me a brother in misfortune. Go to a more profitable market."

"I don't want to hurt you."

"I'll take your word for it. Pass on, then. The way is clear for you."

He stepped aside, and observed that Gautran took step with him instead of from him.

"Are you going to pass on?" asked Gautran.

"Upon my soul this is getting amusing, and I should enjoy it if I were not angry. Am I going to pass on? No, I am not going to pass on."

"Neither am I."

"In the name of all that is mischievous," cried Vanbrugh, "what is it you want?"

"Company," was the answer, "till daylight. That is all. You need not be afraid of me."

"Company!" exclaimed Vanbrugh. "My company?"

"Yours or any man's. Something humansomething living. And you must talk to me. I'm not going to be driven mad by silence."

"You are a cool customer, with your this and that. Are you aware that you are robbing me?"

"I don't want to rob you."

"But you are of solitude. And you appropriate it! No further fooling. Leave me."

"Not till daylight."

"There is something strange in your resolve. Let me have a better look at you."

He laid his hand upon Gautran's shoulder, and the man did not resent the movement. In the evening, when he had arrived in Geneva, he had made an unsuccessful attempt to enter the courthouse; therefore, Gautran being otherwise a stranger to him, he did not recognise in the face of the man he was now looking into, and which he could but dimly see in consequence of the darkness of the night, the prisoner whose trial for murder had caused so great an excitement.

"If I am any judge of human nature," he said, "you are in a bad way. I can see sufficient of you to discern that from a social point of view you are a ruin, a very wreck of respectability, if your lines ever crossed in that direction. In which respect I, who was once a gentleman, and am still, cannot deny that there is something of moral kinship between us. This confers distinction upon you upon me, a touch of obloquy. But I am old

enough not to be squeamish. We must take the world as we find it a villainous world! What say you?"

"A villainous world! Go on talking."

Vanbrugh stood with his face towards the House of White Shadows, watching for the signal he had asked the Advocate to give him. Gautran, facing the man upon whom he had forced his company, stood, therefore, with his back to the villa, the lights in which he had not yet seen.

"Our condition may be borne," continued Vanbrugh, "with greater or lesser equanimity, so long as we feed the body the quality of our food being really of no great importance, so far as the tissues are concerned; but when the mind is thrown off its balance, as I see by your eyes is the case with you, the condition of the man becomes serious. What is it you fear?"

"Nothing human."

"Yet you are at war with society."

"I was; but I am a free man now."

"You have been in peril, then plainly speaking, a gaolbird. What matters? The world is apt to be too censorious; I find no fault with you for your misfortune. Such things happen to the best of us. But you are free now, you say, and you fear nothing in human shape. What is it, then, you do fear?"

"Were you ever followed by a spirit?" asked Gautran, in a hoarse whisper.

"A moment," said Vanbrugh. "Your question startles me. I have about me two mouthfuls of an elixir without which life would not be worth the living. Share and share alike."

He produced a bottle containing about a quarter of a pint of brandy, and saying, "Your health, friend," put it to his lips.

Gautran watched him greedily, and, when he received the bottle, drained it with a gasp of savage satisfaction.

"That is fine, that is fine!" he said; "I wish there were more of it."

"To echo your wish is the extent of my power in the direction of fulfilment. Now we can continue. Was I ever followed by a spirit? Of what kind?"

"Of a woman," replied Gautran with a shudder.

"Being a spirit, necessarily a dead woman!"

"Aye, a dead womanone who was murdered."

A look of sudden and newlyawakened intelligence flashed into Vanbrugh's face. He placed his hand again upon Gautran's shoulder.

"A young woman?" he said.

"Aye," responded Gautran.

"Fair and beautiful?"

"Yes."

"Who met her death in the river Rhone?"

"Ayeit is known to all the world."

"One who sold flowers in the streets of Genevawhose name was Madeline?"

The utterance of the name conjured up the phantom of the murdered girl, and Gautran, with violent shudders, gazed upon the spectre.

"She is thereshe is there!" he muttered, in a voice of agony. "Will she never, never leave me?"

These words confirmed Vanbrugh's suspicion. It was Gautran who stood before him.

"Another winning card," he said, in a tone of triumph, and with a strange smile. "The man is guilty, else why should he fear? Vanbrugh, a life of ease is yours once more. Away with these rags, this moneypinch which has nipped you for years. Days of pleasure, of luxury, are yours to enjoy. You step once more into the ranks of gentlemen. What would the great Advocate in yonder study think of this chance encounter, knowingwhat he has yet to learnthat I hold in my hands what he prizes mostthis fame and honour?"

Gautran heard the words; he turned, and followed the direction of Vanbrugh's gaze.

"There is but one great Advocate, the man who set me free. He lives yonder, then?"

"You know it, rogue," replied Vanbrugh. "There are the lights in his study window. Gautran, you and I must be better acquainted."

But he was compelled to submit to a postponement of his wish, for the next moment he was alone. Gautran had disappeared.



## CHAPTER XXI

### THE SILENT VOICE

Alone in his study the Advocate had time to review his position. His first feeling, when he listened to Gautran's confession, had been one of unutterable horror, and this feeling was upon him when he entered the villa.

From his outward demeanour no person could have guessed how terrible was his inward agitation. Selfrepression was in him a second nature. The habit of concealing his thoughts had been of incalculable value in his profession, and had materially assisted in many of his great victories.

But now he was alone, and when he had locked the studydoor, he threw off the mask.

He had been proud of this victory; it was the greatest he had ever achieved. He knew that it would increase his fame, and that it was an important step in the ladder it had been the delight of his life to climb. Cold as he appeared, and apparently indifferent to success, his ambition was vast, overpowering. His one great aim had been not only to achieve the highest distinction while he lived, but to leave behind him a name which should be placed at the head of all his class a clear and unsullied name which men in after times would quote as a symbol of the triumph of intellect.

It was the sublimity of egoism, contemptible when allied with intellectual inferiority and weakness of character, but justifiable in his case because it was in association with a force of mental gifts little short of marvellous.

In the exercise of his public duties he had been careful never to take a false step. Before he committed himself to a task he invariably made a study of its minutest detail; coned it over and over, stripped it of its outward coverings, probed it to its very heart, added facets to it which lay not only within the region of probability, but possibility; and the result had been that his triumphs were spoken of with wonderment, as something almost higher than human, and within the capacity of no other man.

It had sometimes occurred that the public voice was against a prisoner whose defence he had undertaken, but it was never raised against himself, and perhaps the sweetest reward which was ever bestowed upon him was when, in an unpopular cause which he had conducted to victory, it was afterwards proved that the man he had championed whose very name was an offence was in honest truth a victim instead of a

wronger. It had grown into a fashion to say, "He must have right on his side, or the Advocate would not defend him."

Here, then, was a triple alliance of justice, truth, and humanity and he, their champion and the vindicator and upholder of right. In another sphere of life, and in times when the dragon of oppression was weighing heavily upon a people's liberties, such achievements as his would have caused the champion to be worshipped as a saint certainly as a hero imbued with kingly qualities.

No man really deserves this altitude, though it be sometimes reached. Human nature is too imperfect, its undercurrents are not sufficiently translucent for truth's face to be reflected as in a crystal. But we judge the deed, not the doer, and the man is frequently crowned, the working of whose inner life, were it laid bare, would shock and disgust.

It was when he was at the height of his fame that the Advocate met Adelaide.

Hitherto he had seen but little of women, or, seeing them, had passed them lightly by, but there comes a time in the lives of most men, even of the greatest, when they are abruptly arrested by an influence which insensibly masters them.

Only once in his life had the Advocate wandered from the path he had formed for himself; but it was an idle wandering, partly prompted by a small and unworthy desire to prove himself of two men, the superior, and he had swiftly and effectually thrown the folly aside, never again to be indulged in or renewed. That was many years ago, and had been long forgotten, when Adelaide appeared to him, a star of loveliness, which proved, what few would have believed, that he had a heart.

The new revelation was to him at first a source of infinite gladness, and he yielded to the enchantment. But after a time he questioned himself as to the wisdom of this infatuation. It was then, however, too late. The spell was upon him, and it did not lay in his power to remove it. And when he found that this sweet pleasure did not as it would have done with most men interfere with his active duties, nay, that it seemed to infuse a keener relish into their fulfilment, he asked himself the question, "Why not?" In the simple prompting of the question lay the answer.

He possessed an immense power of concentration. With many subjects claiming close attention he could dismiss them all but the one to which it was necessary he should devote himself, and after much self-communing he satisfied himself that love would be no block to ambition.

And indeed so it proved. Adelaide, dazzled by the attentions of a man who stood so high, accepted his worship, and, warned by friends not to be exigent, made no demands upon his time which interfered with his duties.

He was a devoted but not a passionate lover. On all sides she was congratulated; it gratified her. By many she was envied; it delighted her; and she took pleasure in showing how easily she could lead this man, who to all other women was cold as ice.

In those days it was out of her own vanity and thirst for conquest that she evolved pleasure from the association of her name with his. After their marriage he strove to interest her in the cases upon which he was engaged, but, discovering that her taste did not lie in that direction, he did not persist in his endeavour. It did not lessen his love for her, nor her hold upon him. She was to him on this night as she had ever been, a sweet, affectionate, pure woman, who gave him as much love and honour as a man so much older than herself could reasonably expect.

Something of what has been here expressed passed through his mind as he reflected upon the events of the day. How should he deal with Gautran's confession? That was the point he debated.

When he undertook the defence he had a firm belief in the man's innocence. He had drawn the picture of Gautran exactly as he had conceived it. Vile, degraded, brutal, without a redeeming feature but not the murderer of Madeline the flower girl.

He reviewed the case again carefully, to see whether he could have arrived at any other conclusion. He could not perceive a single defect in his theory. He was justified in his own eyes. He knew that the entire public sentiment was against him, and that he had convinced men against their will. He knew that there was imported into this matter a feeling of resentment at his successful efforts to set Gautran free. What, then, had induced him to come forward voluntarily in defence of this monster? He asked the question of himself aloud, and he answered it aloud: A reverence for justice.

He had not indulged in self-deception when he declared to Gautran's judges that the leading principle of his life had been a desire for justice in small matters as well as great, for the meanest equally with the loftiest of his fellow-creatures. That it did not clash with his ambition was his good fortune. It was not tainted because of this human coincidence. So far, then, he was justified in his own estimation.

But he must be justified also in the eyes of the world. And here intruded the torturing doubt whether this were possible. If he made it known to the world that Gautran was guilty, the answer would be:

"We know it, and knew it, as we believe you yourself did while you were working to set him free. Why did you prevent justice being done upon a murderer?"

"But I believed him innocent," he would say. "Only now do I know him to be guilty!"

"Upon what grounds?" would be asked.

"Upon Gautran's own confession, given to me, alone, on a lonely road, within an hour after the delivery of the verdict."

He saw the incredulous looks with which this would be received. He put himself in the place of the public, and he asked:

"Why, at such a time, in such a spot, did Gautran confess to you? What motive had he? You are not a priest, and the high road is not a confessional."

He could supply to this question no answer which commonsense would accept.

And say that Gautran were questioned, as he would assuredly be. He would deny the statement pointblank. Liberty is sweet to all men.

Then it would be one man's statement against another's; he would be on an equality with Gautran, reduced to his level; and in the judgment of numbers of people Gautran would have the advantage over him. Sides would be taken; he himself, in a certain sense, would be placed upon his trial, and public resentment, which now was smothered and would soon be quite hushed, would break out against him.

Was he strong enough to withstand this? Could he arrest the furious torrent and stand unwounded on the shore, pure and scatheless in the eyes of men?

He doubted. He was too profound a student of human nature not to know that his fair fame would be blotted, and that there would be a stain upon his reputation which would cling to him to the last day of his life.

Still he questioned himself. Should he dare it, and brave it, and bow his head? Who humbles himself lays himself open to the blow and men are not merciful when the chance is offered to them. But he would stand clear in his own eyes; his conscience would approve. To none but himself would this be known. Inward approval would be his sole reward, his sole compensation. A hero's work, however.

For a moment or two he glowed at the contemplation. He soon cooled down, and with a smile, partly of selfpity, partly of selfcontempt, proceeded to the calmer consideration of the matter.

The meaner qualities came into play. The world did not know; what reason was there that it should be enlightenedthat he should enlighten it, to his own injury? The secret belonged to two mento himself and Gautran. It was not likely that Gautran would blurt it out to others; he valued his liberty too highly. So that it was as safe as though it were buried in a deep grave. As for the wrong done, it was a silent wrong. To ruin one's self for a sentiment would be madness; no one really suffered.

The unfortunate girl was at rest. She was a stranger; no person knew her, or was interested in her except for her beauty; she left no family, no father, mother, or sisters, to mourn her cruel death.

There was certainly the woman spoken of as Pauline, but she had disappeared, and was probably in no way related to Madeline. What more likely than that the elder woman's association with the younger arose out of a desire to trade upon the girl's beauty, and appropriate the profits to her own use? A base view of the matter, but natural, human. And having reaped a certain profit out of their trade in flowers, larger than was suspected, the crafty woman of the world had deliberately deserted Madeline and left her to her fate.

Why, then, should he step forward as her avenger, to the destruction of the great name he had spent the best fruits of his mind and the best years of his life to build up? To think of such a thing was Quixotism run mad.

One of the threads of these reflectionsthat which forced itself upon him as the toughest and the most prominentwas contempt of himself for permitting his thoughts to wander into currents so base. But that was his concern; it affected no other person, so long as he chose to hold his own counsel. The difficulty into which he was plunged was not of his seeking. Fate had dealt him a hard stroke; he received it on his shield instead of on his body. Who would say that that was not wise? What other man, having the option, would not have done as he was about to do?

"Cunning sophist, cunning sophist!" his conscience whispered to him; "think not that, wandering in these crooked paths of reasoning, you can find the talisman which will transform wrong into right, or remove the stain which will rest upon your soul."

He answered his conscience: "To none but myself is my soul visible. Who, then, can see the stain?"

His conscience replied: "God!"

"I will confess to Him," he said, "but not to man."

"There is but one right course," his conscience said; "juggle as you may, you know that there is but one right course."

"I know it," he said boldly, "but I am cast in human mould, and am not heroic enough for the sacrifice you would impose upon me."

"Listen," said his conscience, "a voice from the grave is calling to you."

He heard the voice: "Blood for Blood."

He stood transfixed. The images raised by that, silent voice were appalling. They culminated in the impalpable shape of a girl, with pallid face, gazing sadly at him, over whose form seemed to be traced in the air the lurid words, "Blood For Blood!"

Heaven's decree.

The vision lasted but for a brief space. In the light of his strong will such airy terrors could not long exist.

Blood for blood! It once held undisputed sway, but there are great and good men who look upon the fulfilment of the stern decree as a crime. Mercy, humanity, and all the higher laws of civilisation were on their side. But he could not quite stifle the voice.

He took another view. Say that he yielded to the whisperings of his consciencesay that, braving all the consequences of his action, he denounced Gautran. The man had already been tried for murder, and could not be tried again. Set this aside. Say that a way was discovered to bring Gautran again to the bar of earthly justice, of what value was the new evidence that could be brought against him? His own bare wordhis recital of an interview of which he held no proof, and which Gautran's simple denial would be sufficient to destroy. Place this new evidence against the evidence he himself had established in proof of Gautran's innocence, and it became a featherweight. A lawyer of mediocre attainments would blow away such evidence with a breath. It would injure only him who brought it forward.

He decided. The matter must rest where it was. In silence lay safety.

There was still another argument in favour of this conclusion. The time for making public the horrible knowledge of which he had become possessed was passed. After he had received Gautran's confession he should not have lost a moment in communicating with the authorities. Not only had he allowed the hours to slip by without taking action, but in the conversation initiated that evening by Pierre Lamont, in which he had joined, he had tacitly committed himself to the continuance of a belief in Gautran's innocence. He saw no way out of the fatal construction which all who knew him, as well as all who knew him not, would place upon this line of conduct. He had been caught in a trap of his own setting, but he could hide his wounds. Yes; the question was answered. He must preserve silence.

This long selfcommuning had exhausted him. He could not sleep; he could neither read nor study. His mind required relief and solace in companionship. His wife was doubtless asleep; he would not disturb her. He would go to his friend's chamber; Christian Almer would be awake, and they would pass an hour in sympathising converse. Almer had asked him, when they bade each other goodnight, whether he intended immediately to retire to rest, and he had answered that he had much to do in his study, and should probably be up till late in the night.

"I will not disturb you," Almer had said, "but I, too, am in no mood for sleep. I have letters to write, and if you happen to need society, come to my room, and we will have one of our old chats."

As he quitted the study to seek his friend the soft silvery chimes of a clock on the mantel proclaimed the hour. He counted the strokes. It was midnight.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### GAUTRAN FINDS A REFUGE

When John Vanbrugh found himself alone he cried:

"What! Tired of my company already? That is a fine compliment to pay to a gentleman of my breeding. Gautran! Gautran!"

He listened; no answer came.

"A capital disappearance," he continued; "in its way dramatic. The scene, the time, all agreeing. It does not please me. Do you hear me, Gautran," he shouted. "It does not please me. If I were not tied to this spot in the execution of a most important mission, I would after you, my friend, and teach you better manners. He drank my brandy, too, the ungrateful rogue. A waste of good liquora sheer waste! He gets no more without paying its equivalent."

Vanbrugh indulged in this soliloquy without allowing his wrath to interfere with his watch; not for a single moment did he shift his gaze from the windows of the Advocate's study.

"Now what induced him," he said after a pause, "to spirit himself away so mysteriously? From the violent fancy he expressed for my company I regarded him as a fixture; one would have supposed he intended to stick to me like a limpet to a rock. Suddenly, without rhyme or reason, and just as the conversation was getting interesting, he takes French leave, and makes himself scarce.

"I hope he has not left his ghost behind him the ghost of pretty Madeline. Not likely, though. When a partnership such as that is entered into uncommonly unpleasant and inconvenient it must be it is not dissolved so easily.

"Perhaps he was spirited away wanted, after the fashion of our dear Lothario, Don Giovanni. There was no blue fire about, however, and I smell no brimstone. No he disappeared of his own prompting; it will repay thinking over. He saw his phantom even my presence could not keep her from him. He murdered her not a doubt of it and the Advocate has proved his innocence.

"Were it not a double tragedy I should feel disposed to laugh.



"We were speaking of the Advocate when he darted off. But you cannot escape me, Gautran; we shall meet again. An acquaintanceship so happily commenced must not be allowed to drop nor shall it, while it suits my purpose.

"At length, John Vanbrugh, you are learning to be wise. You allowed yourself to be fleeced, sucked dry, and being thrown upon the rocks, stripped of fortune and the means to woo it, you strove to live as knaves live, upon the folly of others like yourself. But you were a poor hand at the trade; you were never cut out for a knave, and you passed through a succession of reverses so hard as almost to break an honest man's heart. It is all over now. I see the sun; bright days are before you, John, the old days over again; but you will spend your money more prudently, my lad; no squandering; exact its value; be wise, bold, determined, and you shall not go down with sorrow to the grave. Edward, my friend, if I had the liquor I would drink to you. As it is"

As it was, he wafted a mocking kiss towards the House of White Shadows, and patiently continued his watch.

Meanwhile Gautran had not been idle.

Upon quitting Vanbrugh, the direction he took was from the House of White Shadows, but when he was at a safe distance from Vanbrugh, out of sight and hearing, he paused, and deliberately set his face towards the villa.

He skirted the hill at its base, and walking with great caution, pausing frequently to assure himself that he was alone and was not being followed, arrived at the gates of the villa. He tried the gates they were locked. Could he climb over them? He would have risked the danger they were set with sharp spikes had he not known that it would take some time, and feared that some person passing along the high road might detect him.

He made his way to the back of the villa, and carefully examined the walls. His eyes were accustomed to darkness, and he could see pretty clearly; it was a long time before he discovered a means of ingress, afforded by an old elm which grew within a few yards of the wall, and the far-spreading branches of which stretched over the grounds.

He climbed the tree, and crept like a cat along the stoutest branch he could find. It bent beneath his weight as he hung suspended from it. It was a fall of twenty feet, but he risked it. He unloosed his hands, and dropped to the earth. He was shaken, but not bruised. His purpose, thus far, was accomplished. He was within the grounds of the villa.

All was quiet. When he had recovered from the shock of the fall, he stepped warily towards the house. Now and then he was startled and alarmed at the shadows of the trees which moved athwart his path, but he mastered these terrors, and crept on and on till he heard the soft sound of a clock striking the hour.

He paused, as the Advocate had done, and counted the strokes. Midnight. When the sound had quite died away, he stepped forward, and saw the lights in the study windows.

Was anybody there? He guessed shrewdly enough that if the room was occupied it would be by no other person than the Advocate. Well, it was the Advocate he came to see; he had no design of robbery in his mind.

He stealthily approached a window, and blessed his good fortune to find that it was partly open. He peered into the study; it was empty. He climbed the sill, and dropped safely into the room.

What a grand apartment! What costly pictures and vases, what an array of books and papers! Beautiful objects met his eyes whichever way he turned. There was the Advocate's chair, there the table at which he wrote. The Advocate had left the room for a while this was Gautran's correct surmise and intended to return. The lamps fully turned up were proof of this. He looked at the papers on the table. Could he have read, he would have seen that many of them bore his own name. On a massive sideboard there were bottles filled with liquor, and glasses. He drank three or four glasses rapidly, and then, coiling himself up in a corner of the room, in a few moments was fast asleep.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### PIERRE LAMONT READS LOVEVERSES TO FRITZ THE FOOL

The bedroom allotted to Pierre Lamont by Mother Denise was situated on the first floor, and adjoined the apartments prepared for Christian Almer. As he was unable to walk a step it was necessary that the old lawyer should be carried upstairs. His bodyservant, expressly engaged to wheel him about and attend to his wants, was ready to perform his duties, but into Pierre Lamont's head had entered the whim that he would be assisted to his room by no person but Fritz the Fool. The servant was sent in search of Fritz, who could not easily be found. It was quite half an hour before the fool made his appearance, and by that time all the guests, with the exception of Pierre Lamont, had left the House of White Shadows.

Out of sympathy with Pierre Lamont's sufferings Father Capel had remained to chat with him until Fritz arrived. But the priest was suddenly called away. Mother Denise, entering the room, informed him that a peasant who lived ten miles from the House of White Shadows urgently desired to see him. Father Capel was about to go out to the man, when Adelaide suggested that he should be brought in, and the peasant accordingly disclosed his errand in the presence of the Advocate and his wife, Pierre Lamont, and Christian Almer.

"I have been to your house," said the peasant, standing, cap in hand, in humble admiration of the grandeur by which he was surrounded, "and was directed here. There is a woman dying in my hut."

"What is her name, and where does she come from?"

"I know not. She has been with us for over three weeks, and it is a sore burden upon us. It happened in this way, reverend father. My hut, you know, is in the cleft of a rock, at the foot of the Burger Pass, a dangerous spot for those who are not familiar with the track. Some twentyfour days ago it was that my wife in the night roused me with the tale of a frightful scream, which, proceeding from one in agony near my hut, pierced her very marrow, and woke her from sleep. I sprang from my bed, and went into the open, and a few yards down I found a woman who had fallen from a height, and was lying in delirious pain upon the sharp stones. I raised her in my arms; she was bleeding terribly, and I feared she was hurt to death. I did the best I could, and carried her into my hut, where my wife nursed and tended her. But from that night to this we have been unable to get one sensible word from her, and she is now at death's door. She needs your

priestly offices, reverend father, and therefore I have come for you."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Adelaide. "Who will pay you for your goodness to this poor creature?"

"God," said Father Capel, replying for the peasant. "It is the poor who help the poor, and in the Kingdom of Heaven our Gracious Lord rewards them."

"I am content," said the peasant.

"But in the contemplation of the Hereafter," said Pierre Lamont, "let us not forget the present. There are many whose loads are too heavy for instance, asses. There are a few whose loads are too light, coffers, like myself. You have had occasion to rebuke me, this night, Father Capel, and were I not a hardened sinner I should be groaning in tribulation. That to the last hour of my life I shall deserve your rebukes, proves me, I fear, beyond hope of redemption. Still I bear in mind the asses' burden. You have used my purse once, in penance; use it again, and pay this man for the loss inflicted upon him by his endeavours to earn the great spiritual reward which, in all humility I say it, does not put bread into human stomachs."

Father Capel accepted Pierre Lamont's purse, and said: "I judge not by words, but by works; your offering shall be justly administered. Come, let us hasten to this unfortunate woman."

When he and the peasant had departed, Pierre Lamont said, with mock enthusiasm:

"A good man! a good man! Virtue such as his is a severe burden, but I doubt not he enjoys it. I prefer to earn my seat in heaven vicariously, to which end my gold will materially assist. It is as though paradise can be bought by weight or measure; the longer the purse the greater the chance of salvation. Ah, here is Fritz. Goodnight, goodnight. Bright dreams to all. Gently, Fritz, gently," continued the old lawyer, as he was being carried up the stairs, "my bones are brittle."

"Brittle enough I should say," rejoined Fritz; "chicken bones they might be from the weight of you."

"Are diamonds heavy, fool?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Fritz, "if I had the selling of you, Master Lamont, I should like to make you the valuer. I should get a rare good price for you at that rate."

In the bedroom Pierre Lamont retained Fritz to prepare him for bed. The old lawyer, undressed, was a veritable skeleton; there was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on his shrivelled bones.

"What would you have done in the age of giants?" asked Fritz, making merry over Pierre Lamont's attenuated form.

"This would have served," replied Pierre Lamont, tapping his forehead with his forefinger. "I should have contrived so as to be a match for them. Bring that small table close to the bedside. Now place the lamp on it. Put your hand into the tailpocket of my coat; you will find a silk handkerchief there."

He tied the handkerchief the colour of which was yellow about his head; and as the small, thin face peeped out of it, brown-skinned and hairless, it looked like the face of a mummy.

Fritz gazed at him, and laughed immoderately, and Pierre Lamont nodded and nodded at the fool, with a smile of much humour on his lips.

"Enjoy yourself, fool, enjoy yourself," he said kindly; "but don't pass your life in laughter; it is destructive of brain power. What do you think of the spirit, Fritz, the appearance of which so alarmed one of the young ladies in our merry party tonight?"

"What do you think of it?" asked Fritz in return, with a quivering of his right eyelid, which suspiciously resembled a wink.

"Ah, ah, knave!" cried Pierre Lamont, chuckling. "I half suspected you."

"You will not tell on me, Master Lamont?"

"Not I, fool. How did you contrive it?"

"With a white sheet and a lantern. I thought it a pity that my lady should be disappointed. Should she leave the place without some warranty that spirits are here, the house would lose its character. Then there is the young master, your Christian Almer. He spoke to me very much as if I were a beast of the field instead of a fool. So I thought I would give him food for thought."

"A dangerous trick, Fritz. Your secret is safe with me, but I would not try it too often. Are there any books in the room? Look about, Fritz, look about."

"For books!" exclaimed Fritz. "People go to bed to sleep."

"I go to bed to think," retorted Pierre Lamont, "and read. People are idiots they don't know how to use the nights."

"Men are not owls," said Fritz. "There are no books in the room."

"How shall I pass the night?" grumbled Pierre Lamont. "Open that drawer; there may be something to read in it."

Fritz opened the drawer; it was filled with books. Pierre Lamont uttered a cry of delight.

"Bring half a dozen of them quick. Now I am happy."

He opened the books which Fritz handed to him, and placed them by his side on the bed. They were in various languages. Lavater, Zimmermann, a Latin book on Demonology, poems of Lope da Vega, Klingemann's tragedies, Italian poems by Zappi, Filicaja, Cassiani, and others.

"You understand all these books, Master Lamont?"

"Of course, fool."

"What language is this?"

"Latin."

"And this?"

"Spanish."

"And this?"

"Italian. No common mind collected these books, Fritz."

"The master that's dead father of him who sleeps in the next room."

"Ha, ha!" interposed Pierre Lamont, turning over the pages as he spoke. "He sleeps there, does he?"

"Yes. His father was a great scholar, I've heard."

"A various scholar, Fritz, if these books are an epitome of his mind. Love, philosophy, gloomy wanderings in dark pathshere we have them all. The lights and shadows of life. Which way runs your taste, fool?"

"I love the light, of course. What use in being a fool if you don't know how to take advantage of your opportunities?"

"Well said. Let us indulge a little. These poets are sly rascals. They take unconscionable liberties, and play with women's beauty as other men dare not do."

Fritz's eyes twinkled.

"It does not escape even you, Master Lamont."

"What does not escape me, fool?"

"Woman's beauty, Master Lamont."

"Have I not eyes in my head and blood in my veins?" asked Pierre Lamont. "It warms me like wine to know that I and the loveliest woman for a hundred miles round are caged within the same roof."

Fritz indulged in another fit of laughter, and then exclaimed:

"She has caught you too, eh? Now, who would have thought it? Two of the cleverest lawyers in the world fixed with one arrow! Beauty is a divine gift, Master Lamont. To possess it is almost as good as being born a fool."

"I shall lie awake and read loveverses. Listen to Zappi, fool."

And in a voice really tender, Pierre Lamont read from the book:

"A hundred pretty little loves, in fun, Were romping; laughing, rioting one day."

"A hundred!" cried Fritz, chuckling and rubbing his hands. "A hundredprettylittle loves! If Father Capel were to hear you, his face would grow as long as my arm."

"Wrong, Fritz, wrong. His face would beam, and he would listen for the continuation of the poem."

And Pierre Lamont resumed:

"Let's fly a little now,' said one, 'I pray.'  
'Whither?' 'To beauty's face.' 'Agreed'tis done.'

"Faster than bees to flowers they wing their way  
To lovely maidsto mine, the sweetest one;  
And to her hair and panting lips they run  
Now here, now there, now everywhere they stray.

"My love so full of lovesdelightful sight!  
Two with their torches in her eyes, and two  
Upon her eyelids with their bows alight."

"You read rarely, Master Lamont," said Fritz. "It is true, is it not, that, when you were in practice, you were called the lawyer with the silver tongue?"

"It has been said of me, Fritz."

The picture of this withered, driedup old lawyer, sitting up in bed, with a yellow handkerchief for a nightcap tied round his head, reading languishing verses in a tender voice, and striving to bring into his weazened features an expression in harmony with them, was truly a comical one.

"Why, Master Lamont," said Fritz in admiration, "you were cut out for a gallant. Had you recited those lines in the drawingroom, you would have had all the ladies at your feetsupposing," he added, with a broad grin, "they had all been blind."

"Ah me!" said Pierre Lamont, throwing aside the book with a mocking sigh. "Too oldtoo old!"

"And shrunken," said Fritz.

"It is not to be denied, Fritz. And shrunken."

"And ugly."

"You stick daggers into me. Yesand ugly. Ah!" and with simulated wrath he shook his fist in the air, "if I were but like my brother the Advocate! Eh, Fritzeh?"

Fritz shook his head slowly.



"If I were not a fool, I should say I would much rather be as you are, old, and withered, and ugly, and a cripple, than be standing in the place of your brother the Advocate. And so would you, Master Lamont, for all your lovesongs."

"I can teach you nothing, fool. Push the lamp a little nearer to me. Give me my waistcoat. Here is a gold piece for you. I owe you as much, I think. We will keep our own counsel, Fritz. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Master Lamont. I am sorry that trial is over. It was rare fun!"

**CHAPTER XXV**  
**MISTRESS AND MAID**

"Dionetta?"

"Yes, my lady."

The maid and her mistress were in Adelaide's dressingroom, and Dionetta was brushing her lady's hair, which hung down in rich, heavy waves.

She smiled at herself in the glass before which she was sitting, and her mood became more joyous as she noted the whiteness of her teeth and the beautiful expression of her mouth when she smiled. There was an irresistible fascination in her smile; it flashed into all her features, like a laughing sunrise.

She was never tired of admiring her beauty; it was to her a most precious possession of which nothing but time could rob her. "Today is mine," she frequently said to herself, and she wished with all her heart that there were no tomorrow.

Yes, today was hers, and she was beautiful, and, gazing at the reflection of her fair self, she thought that she did not look more than eighteen.

"Do you think I do, child?" she asked of Dionetta.

"Think you do what, my lady?" inquired Dionetta.

Adelaide laughed, a musical, childlike laugh which any man, hearing, would have judged to be an expression of pure innocent delight. She derived pleasure even from this pleasant sound.

"I was thinking to myself, and I believed I was speaking aloud. Do you think I look twentyfive?"

"No, indeed, my lady, not by many years. You look younger than I do."

"And you are not eighteen, Dionetta."

"Not yet, my lady."

Adelaide's eyes sparkled. It was indeed true that she looked younger than her maid, who was in herself a beauty and young looking.

"Dionetta," she said, presently, after a pause, "I have had a curious dream."

"I saw you close your eyes for a moment, my lady."

"I dreamt I was the most beautiful woman in all this wide world."

"You are, my lady."

The words were uttered in perfect honesty and simplicity. Her mistress was truly the most beautiful woman she had ever seen.

"Nonsense, child, nonsense there are others as fair, although I should not fear to stand beside them. It was only a dream, and this but the commencement of it. I was the most beautiful woman in the world. I had the handsomest features, the loveliest figure, and a shape that sculptors would have called perfection. I had the most exquisite dresses that ever were worn, and everything in that way a woman's heart could desire."

"A happy dream, my lady!"

"Wait. I had a palace to live in, in a land where it was summer the whole year through. Such gardens, Dionetta, and such flowers as one only sees in dreams. I had rings enough to cover my fingers a dozen times over; diamonds in profusion for my hair, and neck, and arms, trunks full of them, and of old lace, and of the most wonderful jewels the mind can conceive. Would you believe it, child, in spite of all this, I was the most miserable woman in the universe?"

"It is hard to believe, my lady."

"Not when I tell you the reason. Dionetta, I was absolutely alone. There was not a single person near me, old or young not one to look at me, to envy me, to admire me, to love me. What was the use of beauty, diamonds, flowers, dresses? The brightest eyes, the loveliest complexion, the whitest skin all were thrown away. It would have been just as well if I had been dressed in rags, and were old and wrinkled as Pierre Lamont. Now, what I learn from my dream is this that beauty is not worth having unless it is admired and loved, and unless other people can see it as well as yourself."

"Everybody sees that you are beautiful, my lady; it is spoken of everywhere."

"Is it, Dionetta, really, now, is it?"

"Yes, my lady. And you are admired and loved."

"I think I am, child; I know I am. So that my dream goes for nothing. A foolish fancy, was it not, Dionetta?but women are never satisfied. I should never be tirednever, never, of hearing the man I love say, 'I love you, I love you! You are the most beautiful, the dearest, the sweetest!'"

She leant forward and looked closely at herself in the glass, and then sank back in her chair and smiled, and halfclosed her eyes.

"Dionetta," she said presently, "what makes you so pale?"

"It is the Shadow, my lady, that was seen tonight," replied Dionetta in a whisper; "I cannot get it out of my mind."

"But you did not see it?"

"No, my lady; but it was there."

"You believe in ghosts?"

"Yes, my lady."

"You would not have the courage to go where one was to be seen?"

"Not for all the gold in the world, my lady."

"But the other servants are more courageous?"

"They may be, but they would not dare to go; they said so tonight, all of them."

"They have been speaking of it, then?"

"Oh, yes; of scarcely anything else. Grandmother said tonight that if you had not come to the villa, the belief in the shadows would have died away altogether."

"That is too ridiculous," interrupted Adelaide. "What can I have to do with them?"

"If you had not come," said Dionetta, "grandmother said our young master would not be here. It is because he is in the house, sleeping here for the first night for so many, many years, that the spirit of his mother appeared to him."

"But your grandmother has told me she did not believe in the shadows."

"My lady, I think she is changing her opinion else she would never have said what she did. It is long since I have seen her so disturbed."

Adelaide rose from her chair, the fairest picture of womanhood eyes ever gazed upon. A picture an artist would have contemplated with delight. She stood still for a few moments, her hand resting on her writingdesk.

"Your grandmother does not like me, Dionetta."

"She has not said so, my lady," said Dionetta after an awkward pause.

"Not directly, child," said Adelaide, "and I have no reason to complain of want of respect in her. But one always knows whether one is really liked or not."

"She is growing old," murmured Dionetta apologetically, "and has seen very little of ladies."

"Neither have you, child. Yet you do not dislike me."

"My lady, if I dare to say it, I love you."

"There is no daring in it, child. I love to be loved and I would sooner be loved by the young than the old. Come here, pretty one. Your ears are like little pink shells, and deserve something better than those common rings in them. Put these in their place."

She took from a jewelcase a pair of earrings, turquoise and small diamonds, and with her own hands made the exchange.

"Oh, my lady," sighed Dionetta with a roselight in her face. "They are too grand for me! What shall I say when people see them?"

The girl's heart was beating quick with ecstasy. She looked at herself in the glass, and uttered a cry of joy.

"Say that I gave them to you because I love you. I never had a maid who pleased me half as much. Does this prove it?" and she put her lips to Dionetta's face. The girl's eyes filled with tears, and she kissed Adelaide's hand in a passion of gratitude.

"I love you, Dionetta, because you love me, and because I can trust you."

"You can, my lady. I will serve you with all my heart and soul. But I have done nothing for you that any other girl could not have done."

"Would you like to do something for me that I would trust no other to do?"

"Yes, my lady," eagerly answered Dionetta. "I should be proud."

"And you will tell no one?"

"Not a soul, my lady, if you command me."

"I do command you. It is easy to domerely to deliver a note, and to say: 'This is from my mistress.'"

"Oh, my lady, that is no task at all. It is so simple."

"Simple as it is, I do not wish even your grandmother to hear of it."

"She shall notnor any person. I swear it."

In the extravagance of her gratitude and joy, she kissed a little cross that hung from her neck.

"You have made me your friend for life," said Adelaide, "the best friend you ever had, or ever will have."

She sat down to her desk, and on a sheet of notepaper wrote these words:

"Dear Christian:

"I cannot sleep until I wish you goodnight, with no horrid people around us. Let me see you for one minute only.

"Adelaide."

Placing the sheet of notepaper in an envelope, she gave it to Dionetta, saying:

"Take this to Mr. Almer's room, and give it to him. It is nothing of any importance, but he will be pleased to receive it."

Dionetta, marvelling why her lady should place any value upon so slight a service, went upstairs with the note, and returned with the information that Christian Almer was not in his room.

"But his door is open, my lady," she said, "and the lamps are burning."

"Go then, again," said Adelaide, "and place the note on his desk. There is no harm, child; he cannot see you, as he is not there, and if he were, he would not be angry."

Dionetta obeyed without fear, and when she told her mistress that the note was placed where Christian Almer was sure to see it, Adelaide kissed her again, and wished her "Goodnight."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### IN THE HOME OF HIS CHILDHOOD

Upon no person had the supposed appearance of a phantom in the grounds of the House of White Shadows produced so profound an impression as upon Christian Almer. This was but natural. Even supposing him not to have been a man of susceptibility, the young lady's terror, as she gazed at the shadow, could not have failed to make an impression upon him.

It was the first night of his return, after an absence of many years, to the house in which he had been born and had passed his unhappy childhood's life: and the origin of the belief in these white shadows which were said to haunt his estate was so closely woven into his personal history as almost to form a part of himself. He had never submitted his mind to a rigid test of belief or disbelief in these signs; one of the principal aims of his life had been, not only to avoid the villa, but to shut out all thought of the tragic events which had led to the death of his parents.

He loved them both with an equal love. When he thought of his mother he saw a woman patient in suffering, of a temper exquisitely sweet, whose every word and act towards her child was fraught with tenderness. When he thought of his father he saw a man highprincipled and just, inflexible in matters of right and conscience, patient also in suffering, and bearing in silence, as his mother did, a grief which had poisoned his life and hers.

Neither of his parents had ever spoken a word against the other; the mystery which kept this tender, loving woman, and this just, highprincipled man, apart, was never disclosed to their child. On this subject they entrenched themselves behind a barrier of silence which the child's love and winning ways could not penetrate. Only when his mother's eyes were closed and her lips sealed by death was he privileged to witness how deeply his father had loved her.

Much of what had been disclosed to the Advocate's wife by Mother Denise was absolutely unknown to him. Doubtless he could have learned every particular of the circumstances which had led to the separation of his parents, had his wish lain in that direction; but a delicate instinct whispered to him not to lift the veil, and he would permit no person to approach the subject in his presence.

The bright appearance of his sittingroom cheered him when he entered it, after bidding the Advocate goodnight. But this pleasurable sense was not unalloyed. His heart and his



conscience were disturbed, and as he took up a handful of roses which had been thrown loose into a bowl and inhaled their fragrance, a guilty thrill shot through his veins.

With the roses in his hand he stood before the picture of Adelaide, which she had hung above his desk. How bright and beautiful was the face, how lovely the smile with which she greeted him! It was almost as if she were speaking to him, telling him that she loved him, and asking him to assure her once more that her love was returned.

For a moment the fancy came upon him that Adelaide and he were like two stars wandering through a dark and dangerous path, and that before them lay death, and worse than death dishonour and irretrievable ruin; and that she, the brighter star, holding him tightly by the hand, was whispering:

"I will guide you safely; only love me!"

There was one means of escape! A coward's refuge, which might not even afford him a release from dishonour, for Adelaide in her despair might let their secret escape her.

Why, then, should he torture himself unnecessarily? It was not in his power to avert the inevitable. He had not deliberately chosen his course. Fate had driven him into it. Was it not best, after all, to do as he had said to the Advocate that night, to submit without a struggle? Men were not masters, but slaves.

When the image of the Advocate, of his friend, presented itself to him, he thrust it sadly from him. But it came again and again, like the ghost of Banquo; conscience refused to be tricked.

Crumbling the roses in his hand, and strewing the floor with the leaves, he turned, and saw, gazing wistfully at him, the eyes of his mother.

The artist who had painted her picture had not chosen to depict her in her most joyous mood. In his heart also, as she sat before him, love's fever was burning, and he knew, while his brush was fixing her beauty on the canvas, that his love was returned, though treachery had parted them. He had striven, not unsuccessfully, to portray in her features the expression of one who loved and to whom love was denied. The look in her eyes was wistful rather than hopeless, and conveyed, to those who knew her history, the idea of one who hoped to find in another world the happiness she had lost in this.

Sad and tender reminiscences of the years he had lived with his mother in these very rooms stole into Christian Almer's mind, and he allowed his thoughts to dwell upon the

question, "Why had she been unhappy?" She was young, beautiful, amiable, rich; her husband was a man honoured and esteemed, with a character above reproach. What secret would be revealed if the heart of this mystery were laid bare to his sight? If it were in his power to ascertain the truth, might not the revelation cause him additional sorrow? Better, then, to let the matter rest. No good purpose could be served by raking up the ashes of a melancholy past. His parents were dead

And here occurred a sudden revulsion. His mother was dead, but a few short minutes since, her spirit was supposed to have appeared in the grounds of the villa. Almost upon the thought, he hurriedly left the room, and made his way into the gardens.

"My neighbour, and master of this house," said Pierre Lamont, who was lying wide awake in the adjoining room, "does not seem inclined to rest. Something disturbs him."

Pierre Lamont was alone; Fritz the Fool had left him for the night, and the old lawyer, himself in no mood for sleep, was reading and listening to the movements around him. There was little to hear, only an occasional muffled sound which the listener interpreted as best he could; but Christian Almer, when he left his room, had to pass Pierre Lamont's door in his progress to the grounds, and it was the clearer sound of his footsteps which led Pierre Lamont to his correct conclusion.

"He is going out of the house," continued Pierre Lamont. "For what? To look for his mother's ghost, perhaps. Fool Fritz, in raising this particular ghost, did not foresee what it might lead to. Ghosts! And fools still live who believe in them! Well, well, but for the world's delusions there would be little work for busy minds to accomplish. As a fantastic piece of imagery I might conjure up an army of men sweeping the world with brooms made of brains of knavery, folly, trickery, and delusion. What is that? A footstep! Human? No. Too light for any but the feet of a cat!"

But here Pierre Lamont was at fault. It was Dionetta who passed his door in the passage, conveying to Christian Almer's room the note written by the Advocate's wife. Before the arrival of her new mistress, Dionetta had always worn thick boots, and the sound of her footstep was plain to hear; but Adelaide's nerves could not endure the creaking and clattering, and she had supplied her maid with shoes. Besides, Dionetta had naturally a light step.

Christian Almer met with nothing in the grounds to disturb him. No airy shadow appeared to warn him of the danger which threatened him. Were it possible for the spirits of the dead to make themselves seen and heard, assuredly the spirit of his mother would have appeared and implored him to fly from the house without delay. Happy for him would it have been were he one of the credulous fools Pierre Lamont held in despisalhappy for him could he have formed, out of the shadows which moved around him, a spirit in which he would have believed, and could he have heard, in the sighing of the breeze, a voice which would have impressed him with a true sense of the peril in which he stood.

But he heard and saw nothing for which he could not naturally account, and within a few minutes of midnight he reentered his room.

"My neighbour has returned," said Pierre Lamont, "after his nocturnal ramble in search of the spirit of his dead mother. Hark! That sound again! As of some living thing stepping cautiously on the boards. If I were not a cripple I would satisfy myself whether this villa is tormented by restless cats as well as haunted by unholy spirits. When will science supply mankind with the means of seeing, as well as hearing, what is transpiring on the other side of stone and wooden walls?

"Ah, that door of his is creaking. It opensshuts. I hear a murmur of voices, but cannot catch a word. Almer's voice of courseand the Advocate's. Nothe other voice and the soft footsteps are in partnership. Not the Advocate's, nor any man's. Men don't tread like cats. It was a woman who passed my door, and who has been admitted into that room. Being a woman, what woman? If Fool Fritz were here, we would ferret it out between us before we were five minutes older.

"Still talkingtalkinglike the soft murmur of peaceful waves. Ah! a laugh! By all that's natural, a woman's laugh! It is a woman! And I should know that silvery sound. There is a special music in a laugh which cannot be mistaken. It is distinctivecharacteristic.

"Ah, my lady, my lady! Fair face, false heartbut woman, woman all over!"

And Pierre Lamont rubbed his hands, and also laughedbut his laugh was like his speech, silent, voiceless.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### CHRISTIAN ALMER RECEIVES TWO VISITORS

Upon Christian Almer's desk lay the note written by Adelaide. He saw it the moment he entered the room, and knew, therefore, that some person had called during his absence. At first he thought it must have been the Advocate, who, not finding him in his room, had left the note for him; but as he opened the envelope a faint perfume floated from it.

"It is from Adelaide," he murmured. "How often and how vainly have I warned her!"

He read the note:

"Dear Christian:

"I cannot sleep until I wish you goodnight, with no horrid people around us. Let me see you for one minute only.

"Adelaide."

To comply with her request at such an hour would be simple folly; infatuated as he was he would not deliberately commit himself to such an act.

"Surely she cannot have been here," he thought. "But if another hand placed this note upon my desk, another person must share the secret which it is imperative should never be revealed. I must be firm with her. There must be an end to this imprudence. Fortunately there is no place in Edward's nature for suspicion."

He blushed with shame at the unworthy thought. Five years ago, could he have seen he who up to that time never had stooped to meanness and deceit the position in which he now stood, he would have rejected the mere suspicion of its possibility with indignation. But by what fatally easy steps had he reached it!

In the midst of these reflections his heart almost stopped beating at the sound of a light footstep without. He listened, and heard a soft tapping on the door, not with the knuckles, but with the fingertips; he opened the door, and Adelaide stood smiling before him.

With her finger at her lips she stepped into the room, and closed the door behind her.

"It would not do for me to be seen," she whispered. "Do not be alarmed; I shall not be here longer than one little minute. I have only come to wish you goodnight. Give me a chair, or I shall sink to the ground. I am really very, very frightened. Quick; bring me a chair. Do you not see how weak I am?"

He drew a chair towards Her, and she sank languidly into it.

"As you would not come to me," she said, "I was compelled to come to you."

"Compelled!" he said.

They spoke in low tones, fearful lest their voices should travel beyond the room.

"Yes, compelled. I was urged by a spirit."

His face grew white. "A spirit!"

"How you echo me, Christian. Yes, by a spirit, to which you yourself shall give a name. Shall we call it a spirit of restlessness, or jealousy, or love?" She gazed at him with an arch smile.

"Adelaide," he said, "your imprudence will ruin us."

"Nonsense, Christian, nonsense," she said lightly; "ruined because I happened to utter one little word! To be sure I ought, so as to prove myself an apt pupil, to put a longer word before it, and call it platonic love. How unreasonable you are! What harm is there in our having a moment's chat? We are old friends, are we not? No, I will not let you interrupt me; I know what you are going to say. You are going to say, Think of the hour! I decline to think of the hour. I think of nothing but you. And instead of looking delighted, as you should do, as any other man would do, there you stand as serious as an owl. Now, answer me, sir. Why did you not come to me the moment you received my note?"

"I had but just read it when you tapped at my door."

"I forgive you. Where have you been? With the Advocate?"

"No; I have been walking in the grounds."

"You saw nothing, Christian?" she asked with a little shiver.

"Nothing to alarm or disturb me."

"There was a light in the Advocate's study, was there not?"

"Yes."

"He will remain up late, and then he will retire to his room. My life is a very bright and beautiful life with him. He is so tender in his ways so fond of pleasure pays me so much attention, and such compliments is so lighthearted and joyous sings to me, dances with me! Oh, you don't know him, you don't indeed. I remember asking him to join in a cotillon; you should have seen the look he gave me!" She laughed out loud, and clapped her hand on her mouth to stifle the sound. "I wonder whether he was ever young, like you and me. What a wonderful child he must have been with scientific toys, and books always under his arm yes, a wonderful child, holding in disdain little girls who wished him to join in their innocent games. What is your real opinion of him, Christian?"

"It pains me to hear you speak of him in that way."

"It should please you; but men are never satisfied. I speak lightly, do I not, but there are moments when I shudder at my fate. Confess, it is not a happy one."

"It is not," he replied, after a pause, "but if I had not crossed your path, life would be full of joy for you."

It was not this he intended to say, but there was such compelling power in her lightest words that his very thoughts seemed to be under her dominion.

"There would have been no joy in my life," she said, "without you. We will not discuss it. What is, is. Sometimes when I think of things they make my head ache. Then I say, I will think of them no longer. If everybody did the same, would not this world be a great deal pleasanter than it is? Oh, you must not forget what the Advocate called me tonight in your presence a philosopher in petticoats. Don't you see that even he is on my side, though it is against himself? Of course one can't help respecting him. He is a very learned man. He should have married a very learned woman. What a pity it is that I am not wise! But that is not my fault. I hate learning, I hate science, I hate theories. What is the good of them? They say, this is not right, that is not right. And all we poor creatures can do is to look on in a state of bewilderment, and wonder what they mean. If people would only let the world alone, they would find it a very beautiful world. But they will

not let it alone; they will meddle. A flower, now is it not sweet is it not enough that it is sent to give us pleasure? But these disagreeable people say, 'Of what is this flower composed is it as good as other flowers has it qualities, and what qualities?' What do I care? I put it in my hair, and I am happy because it becomes me, because it is pretty, because Nature sent it to me to enjoy. Why, I have actually made you smile!"

"Because there is a great deal of natural wisdom in what you are saying"

"Natural wisdom! There now, does it not prove I am right? Thank you, Christian. It comes to you to say exactly the right thing exactly at the right time. I shall begin to feel proud."

"And," continued Almer, "if you were only to talk to me like that in the middle of the day instead of the middle of the night"

She interrupted him again:

"You have undone it all with your 'ifs.' What does it matter if it is in the middle of the day or the middle of the night? What is right, is right, is it not, without thinking of the time? Don't get disagreeable; but indeed I will not allow you to be anything but nice to me. You have made me forget everything I was going to say."

"Except one thing," he said gravely, "which you came to say, 'Goodnight.'"

"The minute is not gone yet," she said with a silvery laugh.

"Many minutes, many minutes," he said helplessly, "and every minute is fraught with danger."

"I will protect you," she said with supreme assurance. "Do not fear. I see quite plainly that if there is a dragon to kill I shall have to be the St. George. Well, I am ready. Danger is sweet when you are with me."

He was powerless against her; he resigned himself to his fate.

"Who brought your letter to my room?" he asked. "Dionetta."

"Have you confided in her?"

"She knows nothing, and she is devoted to me. If the simple maid thought of the letter at all as to what was in it, I mean she thought, of course, that it was something I wanted you

to do for me tomorrow, and had forgotten to tell you. But even here I was prudent, although you do not give me credit for prudence. I made her promise not to tell a soul, not even her grandmother, that queer, good old Mother Denise, that she had taken a letter from me to you. She did more than promiseshe swore she would not tell. I bribed her, ChristianI gave her things, and tonight I gave her a pair of earrings. You should have witnessed her delight! I would wager that she is at this moment no more asleep than I am. She is looking at herself in the glass, shaking her pretty little head to make the diamonds glisten."

"Diamonds, Adelaide! A simple maid like Dionetta with diamond earrings! What will the folks say?"

"Oh, they all know I am fond of her"

They started to their feet with a simultaneous movement.

"Footsteps!" whispered Almer.

"The Advocate's," said Adelaide, and she glided to the door, and turned the key as softly as if it were made of velvet.

"He will see a light in the room," said Christian. "He has come to talk with me. What shall we do?"

She gazed at him with a bright smile. His face was white with apprehension; hers, red with excitement and exaltation.

"I am St. George," she whispered; "but really there is no dragon to kill; we have only to send him to sleep. Of course you must see him. I will conceal myself in the inner room, and you will lock me in, and put the key in your pocket, so that I shall be quite safe. Do not be uneasy about me; I can amuse myself with books and pictures, and I will turn over the leaves so quietly that even a butterfly would not be disturbed. And when the dragon is gone I will run away immediately. I am almost sorry I came, it has distressed you so."

She kissed the tips of her fingers to him, and entered the adjoining room. Then, turning the key in the door Christian Almer admitted the Advocate.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE WEB

Pause we here a moment, and contemplate the threads of the web which Chance, Fate, or Retribution was weaving round this man.

With the exception of a few idle weeks in his youth, his life had been a life of honour and renown. His ambition was a worthy one, and success had not been attained without unwearied labour and devotion. Close study and application, zeal, earnestness, unflagging industry, these were the steps in the ladder he had climbed. Had it not been for his keen intellect these qualities would not have been sufficient to conduct him to the goal he had in view. Good luck is not to be despised, but unless it is allied with brain power of a high order only an ephemeral success can be achieved.

Never, to outward appearance, was a great reputation more stable or better deserved. His wonderful talents, and the victories he had gained in the face of formidable odds, had destroyed all the petty jealousies with which he had to cope in the outset of his career, and he stood now upon a lofty pinnacle, acknowledged by all as a master in his craft. Wealth and distinction were his, and higher honours lay within his grasp; and, in addition, he had won for his wife one of the most beautiful of women. It seemed as if the world had nothing to add to his happiness.

And yet destruction stared him in the face. The fabric he had raised, on a foundation so secure that it appeared as if nothing could shake it, was tottering, and might fall, destroying him and all he had worked for in the ruins.

He stood at the door of the only man in the world to whom he had given the full measure of his friendship. With all the strength of his nature he believed in Christian Almer. In the gravest crisis of his life he would have called this friend to his side, and would have placed in his hands, without hesitation, his life, his reputation, and his honour. To Almer, in their conversation, he had revealed what may be termed his inner life, that life the workings of which were concealed from all other men. And in this friend's chamber his wife was concealed; and dishonour hung over him by the slenderest thread. Not only dishonour, but unutterable grief, for he loved this woman with a most complete undoubting love. Little time had he for dalliance; but he believed in his wife implicitly. His trust in her was a perfect trust.

Within the room at the door of which he was waiting, stood his one friend, with white face and guilty conscience, about to admit him and grasp his hand. Had the heart of this friend been laid bare to him, he would have shrunk from it in horror and loathing, and from that moment to the last moment of his life the sentiment of friendship would have been to him the bitterest mockery and delusion with which man could be cursed.

Not five yards from where he stood lay Pierre Lamont, listening and watching for proofs of the perfidy which would bring disgrace upon him which would cause men and women to speak of him in terms of derision for his blindness and scorn for his weakness which would make a byword of him of him, the great Advocate, who had played his part in many celebrated cases in which woman's faithlessness and disloyalty were the prominent features and which would cause him to regard the sentiment of love as the falsest delusion with which mankind was ever afflicted.

In the study he had left but a few minutes since slept a man who, in a certain sense, claimed comradeship with him, a man whom he had championed and set free, a self-confessed murderer, a wretch so vile that he had fled from him in horror at the act he had himself accomplished.

And in the open air, upon a hill, a hundred yards from the House of White Shadows, lay John Vanbrugh, a friend of his youth, a man disgraced by his career, watching for the signal which would warrant him in coming forward and divulging what was in his mind. If what John Vanbrugh had disclosed in his mutterings during his lonely watch was true, he held in his hands the key to a mystery, which, revealed, would overwhelm the Advocate with shame and infamy.

Thus was he threatened on all sides by friend and foe alike.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A CRISIS

"Have I disturbed you, Christian?" asked the Advocate, entering the room. "I hesitated a moment or two, hearing no sound, but seeing your lamp was lighted, I thought you were up, and might be expecting me."

"I had an idea you would come," said Almer, with a feeling of relief at the Advocate's statement that he had heard no sound; and then he said, so that he might be certain of his ground, "You have not been to my room before tonight?"

"No; for the last two hours I have not left my study. Half an hour's converse with you will do me good. I am terribly jaded."

"The reaction of the excitement of the long trial in which you have been engaged."

"Probably; though I have endured fatigue as great without feeling as jaded as I do now."

"You must take rest. Your doctors who prescribed repose for you would be angry if they were aware of the strain you have put upon your mind."

"They do know. The physician I place the greatest faith in writes to me that I must have been mad to have undertaken Gautran's defence. It might have been better if I had not entered into that trial."

"You have one consolation. Defended by a lawyer less eminent than yourself, an unfortunate man might have been convicted of a crime he did not commit."

"Yes," said the Advocate slowly, "that is true."

"You compel admiration, Edward. With frightful odds against you, with the public voice against you, you voluntarily engage in a contest from which nothing is to be gained, and come out triumphant. I do not envy the feelings of the lawyers on the other side."

"At least, Christian, as you have said, they have the public voice with them."

"And you, Edward, have justice on your side, and the consciousness of right. The higher height is yours; you must regard these narrower minds with a feeling of pity."

"I have no feeling whatever for them; they do not trouble me. Christian, we will quit the subject of Gautran; you can well understand that I have had enough of him. Let us speak of yourself. I am an older man than you, and there is something of a fatherly interest in the friendship I entertain for you. Since my marriage I have sometimes thought if I had a son I should have been pleased if his nature resembled yours, and if I had a daughter it would be in the hands of such a man as yourself I should wish to place her happiness."

"You esteem me too highly," said Almer, in a tone of sadness.

"I esteem you as you deserve, friend. Within your nature are possibilities you do not recognise. It is needful to be bold in this world, Christian; not arrogant, or overconfident, or vainglorious, but modestly bold. Unless a man assert himself his powers will lie dormant; and not to use the gifts with which we are endowed is a distinct reproach upon us. I have heard able men say it is a crime to neglect our powers, for great gifts are bestowed upon us for others' good as well as for our own. Besides, it is healthy in every way to lead a busy life, to set our minds upon the accomplishment of certain tasks. If we failwell, failure is very often more honourable than success. We have at least striven to mount the hill which rises above the pettiness and selfishness of our everyday life; we have at least proved ourselves worthy of the spiritual influences which prompt the execution of noble deeds. You did not reply to the letter I sent you in the mountains; but Adelaide heard from you, and that is sufficient. Sufficient, also, that you are here with us, and that we know we have a true friend in the house. You were many weeks in the mountains."

"Yes."

"Were you engaged on any work? Did you paint or write?"

"I made a few sketches, which pleased me one day and displeased me the next, so I tore them up and threw them away. There is enough indifferent work in the world."

"Nothing short of perfection will satisfy you," said the Advocate with a serious smile; "but some men must march in the ranks."

"I am not worthy even of that position," said Almer moodily.

The Advocate regarded him with thoughtful eyes.

"If your mind is not deeply reflective, if your power of observation applies only to the surface of things, you are capable of imparting what some call tenderness and I call soul, to every subject which presents itself to you. I have detected this in your letters and

conversation. It is a valuable quality. I grant that you may be unfit to cope with practical matters, but in your study you would be able to produce works which would charm if they did not instruct. There is in you a heart instinct which, as it forms part of your nature, would display itself in everything you wrote."

"Useless, Edward, useless! My father was an author; it brought him no happiness."

"How do you know? It may have afforded him consolation, and that is happiness. But I was not speaking of happiness. The true artist does not look to results. He has only one aim and one desire to produce a perfect work. His task being done not that he produces a perfect work, but the ennoblement lies in the aspiration and the earnest application that being done, he has accomplished something worthy, whatever its degree of excellence. The day upon which a man first devotes himself to such labour he awakes within his being a new and delightful life, the life of creative thought. Fresh wonders continually reveal themselves quaint suggestions, exquisite fancies, and he makes use of them according to the strength of his intellect. He enriches the world."

"And if he is a poor man, starves."

"Maybe; but he wears the crown. You, however, are rich."

"Nothing to be grateful for. I had no incentive to effort, therefore I stand today an idle, aimless man. You have spoken of books. When I looked at crowded bookshelves, I should blush at the thought of adding to them any rubbish of my own creation."

"I find no fault with you for that. Blush if you like but work, produce."

"And let the world call me vain and presumptuous."

"Give it the chance of judging; it may be the other way. Perhaps the greatest difficulty we have to encounter in life is in the discovery of that kind of work for which we are best fitted. Fortunate the man who gravitates to it naturally, and who, having the capacity to become a fine shoemaker, is not clapped upon a watchmaker's bench instead of a cobbler's stool. Being fitted, he is certain to acquire some kind of distinction. Believe me, Christian, it is not out of idleness, or for the mere purpose of making conversation that I open up this subject. It would afford me great pleasure if you were in a more settled frame of mind. You cannot disguise from me that you are uneasy, perhaps unhappy. I see it this very moment in your wandering glances, and in the difficulty you experience in fixing your attention upon what I am saying. You are not satisfied with yourself. You have probably arrived at that stage when a man questions himself as to what is before him when he reviews the past, and discovers that he has allowed the years to slip by

without having made an effort to use them to a worthy end. You ask yourself, 'Is it for this I am here? Are there not certain duties which I ought to perform? If I allow the future to slip away as the past has done, without having accomplished a man's work in the world, I shall find myself one day an old man, of whom it may be said, "He lived only for himself; he had no thought, no desire beyond himself; the struggles of humanity, the advance of civilisation, the progress and development of thought which have effected such marvellous changes in the aspects of society, the exposing of errors these things touched him not; he bore no part in them, but stood idly by, a careless observer, whose only ambition it was to utilise the hours to his own selfish pleasures.'" A heavy charge, Christian. What you want is occupation. Politics your inclinations do not lead that way; trade is abhorrent to you. You are not sufficiently frivolous to develop into a butterfly leader of fashion. Law is distasteful to you. Science demands qualities which you do not possess. For a literary life you are specially adapted. I say to you, turn your attention to it for a while. If it disappoint you, it is easy to relinquish it. It will be but an attempt made in the right direction. But understand, Christian, without earnestness, without devotion, without application, it will be useless to make the attempt."

"And that is precisely the reason why I hesitate to make it. I am wanting in firmness of purpose. I doubt myself; I should have begun earlier."

"But you will think over what I have said?"

"Yes, I will think of it, and I cordially thank you."

"And now tell me how you enjoyed yourself in the mountains."

"Passably well. It was a negative sort of life. There was no pleasure in it, and no pain. One day was so exactly like another, that I should scarcely have been surprised if I had awoke one morning and discovered that in the dull uniformity of the hours my hair had grown white and I into an old man. The principal subject of interest was the weather, and that palled so soon that sunshine or storm became a matter of indifference to me."

"Look at me a moment, Christian."

They sat gazing at each other in silence for a little while. There was an unusual tenderness in the Advocate's eyes which pierced Christian Almer to the heart. During the whole of this interview the thought never left his mind:

"If he knew the part I am playing towards him if he suspected that simply by listening at this inner door he could hear his wife's soft breathing in what way would he call me to account for my treachery?"

He dreaded every moment that something would occur to betray him.

Adelaide was careless, reckless. If she made a movement to attract attention, if she overturned a chair, if she let a book fall, what was he to say in answer to the Advocate's questioning look?

But all was quiet within; he was tortured only by the whisperings of his conscience.

"You are suffering, Christian," said the Advocate.

Almer knew intuitively that on this point, as on many others, it would be useless to attempt to deceive the Advocate. To return an evasive answer might arouse suspicion. He said simply:

"Yes, I am suffering."

"It is not bodily suffering, though your pulse is feverish." He had taken Almer's wrist, and his fingers were on the pulse. "Your disease is mental." He paused, but Almer did not speak. "It is no breach of confidence," continued the Advocate, "to tell you that on the first day of my entering Geneva, Jacob Hartrich and I had a conversation about you. There was nothing said that need be kept private. We conversed as two men might converse concerning an absent friend in whom both took an affectionate interest. He had noticed a change in you which I have noticed since I entered this room. When you visited him he was impressed by an unusual strangeness in your manner. That strangeness of manner, without your being aware of it, is upon you now. He said that you were restless and ill at ease. You are at this moment restless and ill at ease. The muscles of your face, your eyes, your hands, are not under your control. They respond to the mental disease which causes you to suffer. You will forgive me for saying that you convey to me the impression that you would be more at ease at the present time if I were not with you."

"I entreat you," said Almer eagerly, "not to think so."

"I accept your assurance, which, nevertheless, does not convince me that I am wrong in my impression. The friendship which exists between us is too close and binding I may even go so far as to say, too sacred for me, a colder and more experienced man than yourself, to allow it to be affected by any matter outside its boundary. Deprive it of sympathy, and friendship is an unmeaning word. I sympathise with you deeply, sincerely, without knowing how to relieve you. I ask you frankly, however, one question

which you may freely answer. Have you fixed your affections upon a woman who does not reciprocate your love?"

The Advocate was seated by the desk upon which Almer had, after reading it, carelessly thrown the note written to him by Adelaide, and as he put the question to his friend, he involuntarily laid his hand upon this damning evidence of his wife's disloyalty.



## CHAPTER XXX

### SELFJUSTIFICATION

The slight action and the significant question presented a coincidence so startling that Christian Almer was fascinated by it. That there was premeditation or design in the coincidence, or that the Advocate had cunningly led the conversation to this point for the purpose of confounding him and bringing him face to face with his treachery, did not suggest itself to his mind. He was, indeed, incapable of reasoning coherently. All that he was momentarily conscious of was, that discovery was imminent, that the sword hung over him, suspended by a hair. Would it fall, and in its fall compel into a definite course the conflicting passions by which he was tortured?

It would, perhaps, be better so. Already did he experience a feeling of relief at this suggestion, and it appeared to him as if he were bending his head for the welcome blow.

But all was still and quiet, and through the dim mist before his eyes he saw the Advocate gazing kindly upon him.

Then there stole upon him a wild prompting, a mad impulse, to expedite discovery by his own voluntary act to say to the Advocate:

"I have betrayed you. Read that note beneath your hand; take this key, and open yonder door; find there your wife. What do you propose to do?"

The words did actually shape themselves in his mind, and he half believed that he had uttered them. They did not, however, escape his lips. He was instinctively restrained by the consideration that in his punishment Adelaide would be involved. What right had he deliberately to ruin and expose her? A cowardly act thus to sacrifice a woman who in this crisis relied upon him for protection. In a humiliating, shameful sense it is true, but none the less was she under his direct protection at this moment. Selftortured as he was he could still show that he had some spark of manliness left in him. To recklessly dispose of the fate of the woman whose only crime was that she loved him this he dared not do.

His mood changed. Arrived at this conclusion, his fear now was that he had betrayed himself that in some indefinite way he had given the Advocate the key to his thoughts, or that he had, by look or expression, conveyed to his friend a sense of the terrible importance of the perfumed note which lay upon the desk.

"You do not answer me, Christian," said the Advocate.

But Almer could not speak. His eyes were fixed upon Adelaide's note, and he found it impossible to divert his attention from the idle movements of the Advocate's fingers. His unreasoning impulse to hasten discovery was gone, and he was afflicted now by a feeling of apprehension. It was his imperative duty to protect Adelaide; while the Advocate's hand rested upon the envelope which contained her secret she was not safe. At all risks, even at the hazard of his life, must she be held blameless. Had the Advocate lifted the envelope from the desk, Almer would have torn it from him.

"Why do you not speak?" asked the Advocate. "Surely there is nothing offensive in such a question between friends like ourselves."

"I can offer you no explanation of what I am about to say," replied Almer: "it may sound childish, trivial, pitiful, but my thoughts are not under my own control while your hand is upon that letter."

With the slightest expression of surprise the Advocate handed Almer the envelope, scarcely looking at it as it passed from his possession.

"Why did you not speak of it before?" he said. "But when a mind is unbalanced, trifling matters are magnified into importance."

"I can only ask you to forgive me," said Almer, placing the envelope in his pocketbook. "I have no doubt in the course of your career you have met with many small incidents quite as inexplicable." Then an excuse which would surely be accepted occurred to him. "It may be sufficient for me to say that this is the first night of my return to the house in which I was born and passed a not too happy boyhood, and that in this room my mother died."

The Advocate pressed Almer's hand.

"There is no need for another word. You have been looking over some old family papers, and they have aroused melancholy reminiscences. I should have been more thoughtful; I was wrong in coming to you. It will be best to say goodnight."

But Almer, anxious to avoid the slightest cause for suspicion in the right direction, said:

"Nay, stay with me a few minutes longer, or I shall reproach myself for having behaved unreasonably. You were asking"

"A delicate question. Whether you love without being loved in return?"

"No, Edward, that is not the case with me."

"You have no intention of marrying?"

"No."

"Then your heart is still free. You reassure me. You are not suffering from what has been described as the most exquisite of all human sufferings—unrequited love. Neither have you experienced a disappointment in friendship?"

"No. I have scarcely a friend with the exception of yourself."

"And my wife. You must not forget her. She takes a cordial interest in you."

"Yes, and your wife."

"It was Jacob Hartrich who suggested that you might have met with a disappointment in love or friendship. I disputed it, in the belief that had it been unhappily so you would have confided in me. I am glad that I was right. Shall I continue?"

"Yes."

"The banker, who entertains the most kindly sentiments towards you, based all his conjectures upon a certain remark which made a strong impression upon him. You told him you were weary of the gaiety and the light and bustle of cities, and that it was your intention to seek some solitude where, by a happy chance, you might rid yourself of a terror which possessed you. I can understand your weariness of the false glare of fashionable city life; it can never for any long period satisfy the intellect. But neither can it instil a terror into a man's soul. That would spring from another and a deeper cause."

"The words were hastily spoken. Look upon them as an exaggeration."

"I certainly regard them in that light, but they were not an invention, and there must have been a serious motive for them. It is not in vain that I have studied your character, although I feel that I did not master the study. I am subjecting you, Christian, to a kind of mental analysis, in an endeavour to arrive at a conclusion which will enable me to be of assistance to you. And I do not disguise from you that, were it in my power, I would assist you even against your will. Our friendship, and my age and more varied experience, would justify me. I do not seek to force your confidence, but I ask you in the

spirit of true friendship to consider not at present, but in a few days, when your mind is in a calmer state whether such counsel and guidance as it may be in my power to offer will not be a real help to you. Do not lightly reject my assistance in probing a painful wound. I will use my knife gently. There was a time when I believed there was nothing that could happen to either of us which we should be unwilling to confide each to the other, freely and without restraint. I find I am not too old to learn the lesson that the strongest beliefs, the firmest convictions, may be seriously weakened by the occurrence of circumstances for which the wisest foresight could not have provided. Keep, then, your secret, if you are so resolved, and bear in mind that on the day you come to me and say, 'Edward, help me, guide me,' you will find me ready. I shall not fail you, Christian, in any crisis."

Almer rose and slowly paced the room, while the Advocate sat back in his chair, and watched his friend with affectionate solicitude.

"Does this lesson," presently said Almer, "which you are not too old to learn, spring entirely from the newer impressions you are receiving of my character, or has something in your mind which you have not disclosed helped to lead you to it?"

It was a chance shot, but it strangely hit the mark. The question brought forcibly to the Advocate's mind the position in which he himself was placed by Gautran's confession, and by his subsequent resolve to conceal the knowledge of Gautran's crime.

"What a web is the world!" he thought. "How the lines which here are widely apart, but a short space beyond cross and are linked in closest companionship!" Both Christian and himself had something to conceal, and it would be acting in bad faith to his friend were he to return an evasive answer.

"It is not entirely from the newer impressions you speak of that I learn the lesson. It springs partly from a matter which disturbs my mind."

"Referring to me?"

"No, to myself. You are not concerned in it."

In his turn Almer now became the questioner.

"A new experience of your own, Edward?"

"Yes."

"Which must have occurred to you since we were last together?"

"It originated during your absence."

"Which came upon you unaware for which your foresight could not have provided?"

"At all events it did not."

"You speak seriously, Edward, and your face is clouded."

"It is a very serious matter."

"Can I help you? Is it likely that my advice would be of assistance?"

"I can speak of it to no one."

"You also have a secret then?"

"Yes, I also have a secret."

Christian Almer appeared to gather strength a warranty, as it were, for his own wrongdoing from the singular direction the conversation had taken. It was as though part of a burden was lifted from him. He was not the only one who was suffering he was not the only one who was standing on a dangerous brink he was not the only one who had drifted into dangerous waters. Even this strongbrained man, this Advocate who had seemingly held aloof from pleasure, whose days and nights had been given up to study, whose powerful intellect could pierce dark mysteries and bring them into clear light, who was the last man in the world who could be suspected of yielding to a prompting of which his judgment and conscience could not approve even he had a secret which he was guarding with jealous care. Was it likely then, that he, the younger and the more impressionable of the two, could escape snares into which the Advocate had fallen? The fatalist's creed recurred to him. All these matters of life were preordained. What folly what worse than folly, what presumption, for one weak man to attempt to stem the irresistible current! It was delivering himself up to destruction. Better to yield and float upon the smooth tide and accept what good or ill fate has in store for him. What use to infuse into the sunlight, and the balmy air, and into all the sweets of life, the poison of selftorture? The confession he had extracted from the Advocate was in a certain sense a justification of himself. He would pursue the subject still further. As he had been questioned, so he would question. It was but just.

"To judge from your manner, Edward, your secret is no light one."

"It is of most serious import."

"I almost fear to ask a question which occurs to me."

"Ask freely. I have been candid with you, in my desire to ascertain how I could help you in your trouble. Be equally candid with me."

"But it may be misconstrued. I am ashamed that it should have suggested itself for which, of course, the worse part of me is responsible. No it shall remain unspoken."

"I should prefer that you asked it nay, I desire you to do so. There is no fear of misconstruction. Do you think I wish to stand in your eyes as a perfect man? That would be arrogant, indeed. Or that I do not know that you and I and all men are possessed of contradictions which, viewed in certain aspects, may degrade the most noble? The purest of us men and women alike have undignified thoughts, unworthy imaginings, to which we would be loth to give utterance. But sometimes, as in this instance, it becomes a duty. I have had occasion quite lately to question myself closely, and I have fallen in my own estimation. There is more baseness in me than I imagined. Hesitate no longer. Ask your question, and as many more as may arise from it; these things are frequently hydra-headed. I shall know how far to answer without disclosing what I desire shall remain buried."

Almer put his question boldly.

"Is the fate of a woman involved in your secret?"

An almost imperceptible start revealed to Almer's eyes that another chance arrow had hit the mark. Truly, a woman's fate formed the kernel of the Advocate's secret a virtuous, innocent woman who had been most foully murdered. He answered in set words, without any attempt at evasion.

"Yes, a woman's fate is involved in it."

"Your wife's?" Had his life depended upon it, Almer could not have kept back the words.

"No, not my wife's."

"In that case," said Almer slowly, "a man's honour is concerned."

"You guess aright a man's honour is concerned."

"Yours?"

"Mine."

For a few moments neither of them spoke, and then the Advocate said:

"To men suspicious of each other as most men naturally are, and generally with reasons such a turn in our conversation, and indeed the entire conversation in which we have indulged, might be twisted to fatal disadvantage. In the way of conjecture I mean as to what is the essence of the secret which I do not reveal to my dearest friend, and the essence of that which my dearest friend does not reveal to me. It is fortunate, Christian, that you and I stand higher than most. We have rarely hesitated to speak heart to heart and soul to soul; and if, by some strange course of events, there has arisen in each of our inner lives a mystery which we have decided not to reveal, it will not weaken the feeling of affection we entertain for each other. Is that so, Christian?"

"Yes, it is so, Edward."

"Men of action, of deep thought, of strong passion, of sensitive natures, are less their own masters than peasants who take no part in the turmoil of the world. An uneventful life presents fewer temptations, and there is therefore more freedom in it. We live in an atmosphere of wine, and often miss our way. Well, we must be indulgent to each other, and be sometimes ready to say, 'The position of difficulty into which you have been thrust, the error you have committed, the sin yes, even the sin of which you have been guilty, may have fallen to my lot had I been placed in similar circumstances. It is not I who will be the first to condemn you.'"

"Even," said Almer, "if that error or that sin may be a grievous wrong inflicted against yourself. Even then you would be ready to excuse and forgive?"

"Yes, even in that case. I should be taking a narrow view of an argument if I applied to all the world what I hesitated to apply to myself."

"So that the committal of a great wrong may be justified by circumstances?"

"Yes, I will go as far as that. The fault of the child or the fault of the man, is but a question of degree. Some err deliberately, some are hurried into error by passions which master them."

"By natural passions?"

"All such passions are natural, although it is the fashion to condemn them when they clash with the conditions of social life. The workings of the moral and sympathetic affections are beyond our own control."

"Of those who have erred with deliberate intention and those who have been hurried blindly into error, which should you be most ready to forgive?"

"The latter," replied the Advocate, conscious that in his answer he was condemning himself; "they are comparatively innocent, having less power over, and being less able to retrace their steps."

"You pause," said Almer, a sudden thrill agitating his veins. "Why?"

"I thought I heard a sound like a suppressed laugh! Did you not hear it?"

"No. I heard nothing."

Almer's teeth met in scorn of himself as he uttered this falsehood. The sound of the laugh was low but distinct, and it proceeded from the room in which Adelaide was concealed.

The Advocate stepped to the door by which he had entered, and looked up and down the passage, to which two lamps gave light. It was quiet and deserted.

"My fancy," he said, standing within the halfopen door. "My physicians know more of the state of my nerves than I do myself. It is interesting, however, to observe one's own mental delusions. But I was wrong in mixing myself up with that trial."

Still that trial. Always that trial. It seemed to him as if he could never forget it, as if it would forever abide with him. It coloured his thoughts, it gave form to his arguments. Would it end by changing his very nature?

"You are overwrought, Edward," said Almer. "If you were to seek what I have sought, solitude, it might be more beneficial to you than it has been to me."

"There is solitude enough for me in this retired village," said the Advocate, "and had I not undertaken the defence of Gautran, my health by this time might have been completely established. We are here sufficiently removed from the fierce passions of the world they cannot touch us in this primitive birthplace of yours. Do you recognise how truly I spoke when I said that men like ourselves are the slaves, and peasants the free



men? Besides, Christian, there is a medicine in friendship such as yours which I defy the doctors to rival. Even though there has been a veil over our confidences tonight, I feel that this last hour has been of benefit to me. You know that I am much given to thinking to myself. As a rule, at those times, one walks in a narrow groove; if he argues, the contradiction he receives is of that mild character that it can be easily proved wrong. No wonder, when the thinker creates it for the purpose of proving himself right. It is seldom healthy, this solitary communion; it leads rarely to just conclusions. But in conversation new byroads reveal themselves, in which we wander pleasantly; new vistas appear; new suggestions arise, to give variety to the argument and to show that it has more than one selfish side. He who leads entirely a life of thought lives a dead life. Goodnight, Christian. I have kept you from your rest. Goodnight. Sleep well."

## CHAPTER XXXI

### SHADOWS

Christian Almer stood at the door, gazing at the retreating figure of the Advocate. It passed through the clear light of the lamps, became blurred, was merged in the darkness. The corridor was long, and before the Advocate reached the end he was a shadow among shadows.

In Almer's excited mood the slightest impressions became the medium for distorted reflection. The dim form of the Advocate was pregnant with meaning, and when it was finally lost to sight, Almer's eyes followed an invisible figure moving, not through space, but through events in which he and his friend and Adelaide were the principal actors. A wild whirl of images crowded to his mind, presenting in the midst of their confusion defined and distinct pictures, the leading features of which were the consequences arising from the double betrayal of love and friendship. Violent struggles, deadly embraces in houses, in forests, on the brinks of precipices, in the torrents of furious rivers. The proportions of these images were vast, titanic. The forests were interminable, the trees rose to an immense height, the rivers resembled raging seas, the presentments of animated life were of unnatural magnitude. Even when he and Adelaide were flying through a trackless wood, and were overtaken by the Advocate, this impression of gigantic growth prevailed, as though there were room in the world for naught but themselves and the passions by which they were swayed.

He was recalled to himself by a soft tapping at the door of the inner room. He instantly unlocked it, and released Adelaide, who raised her eyes, beaming with animation, to his.

He was overcome with astonishment. He thought to see her pale, frightened, trembling. Never had he beheld her more radiant.

"He is gone," she said in a gay tone.

"Hush!" whispered Almer, "he may return."

"He will not," she said. "You will see him no more tonight."

"Thank Heaven the danger is averted! I feel as if I had been guilty of some horrible crime."

"Whereas you have simply indulged poor innocent me in a harmless fancy. Christian, I heard every word."

"I thought you would have fallen asleep. How could you have been so imprudent, so reckless, as to laugh?"

"How can I help being a woman of impulse? Were you very much frightened? I was not I rather enjoyed it. Christian, there is not a single thing my immaculate husband does which does not convince me he has no heart. Just think what might have happened if he had come to the right door and thrown it open and seen me! There! You look so horrified that I feel I have said something wrong again. Christian, what did you mean by saying to him, 'My thoughts are not under my control while you have your hand on that letter'? What letter was it?"

"Your note, which Dionetta left in the room. He was sitting by the desk upon which I had laid it, and his hand was upon it."

"And it made you nervous? To think that he had but to open that innocent bit of paper! What a scene there would have been! I should have gloried in the situation yes, indeed. There is no pleasure in life like the excitement of danger. Those who say women are weak know nothing of us. We are braver than men, a thousand, thousand times braver. I tried to peep through the door, but there wasn't a single friendly crevice. What a shock it would have given him if I had suddenly called out as he held the letter: 'Open it, my love, open it and read it!'"

"That is what you call being prudent?" said Almer in despair.

"Tyrant! I cannot promise you not to think. I have a good mind to be angry with you. You are positively ungrateful. You shut me up in a room all by myself, where I quietly remain, the very soul of discretion you did not so much as hear me breathe only forgetting myself once when my feelings overcame me, and you don't give me one word of praise. Tell me instantly, sir, that I am a brave little woman."

"You are the personification of rashness."

"How ungrateful! Did you think of me, Christian, while I was locked up there?"

"My thoughts did not wander from you for a moment."

"If you had only given me a handful of these roseleaves so that I might have buried my face in them and imagined I was not tied to a man who loves another woman than his

wife! You seem amazed. Do you forget already what has passed between you? If it had happened that I loved him, after his confession tonight I should hate him. But it is indifferent to me upon whom he has set his affections with all my heart I pity the unfortunate creature he loves. She need not fear me; I shall not harm her. You got at the heart of his secret when you asked him if a woman was involved in it; and you compelled him to confess that his honour and of course hers; mine does not matter was at stake in his miserable love affair. He loves a woman who is not his wife; with all his evasions he could not help admitting it. And this is the man who holds his head so high above all other men the man who was never known to commit an indiscretion! Of course he must keep his secret close of course he could not speak of it to his friend, whom he tries to hoodwink with professions and twisted words! He married me, I suppose, to satisfy his vanity; he wanted the world to see that old as he was, grave as he was, no woman could resist him. And I allowed myself to be persuaded by worldly friends! Is it not a proof of my never having loved him, that, instead of hating him when in my hearing he confesses he loves another, I simply laugh at him and despise him? I should not shed a tear over him if he died tonight. He has insulted me and what woman ever forgets or forgives an insult? But he has done me a good service, too, and I thank him. How sleepy I am! Goodnight. My minute is up, and I cannot stay longer; I must think of my complexion. Goodnight, Christian; that is all I came to say."

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE ADVOCATE FEARS HE HAS CREATED A MONSTER

The Advocate did not immediately return to his study. Darkness was more congenial to his mood, and he spent a few minutes in the gardens of the villa. Although he had stated to Christian Almer that the conversation which had passed between them had been of benefit to him, he felt, now that he was alone, that there was much in it to give rise to disturbing thought and conjecture. He had not foreseen the difficulty, in social intercourse, of avoiding the subject uppermost in his mind. A morbid selfconsciousness, at present in its germ, and from which he had hitherto been entirely free, seemed to unlock all roads in its direction. It was, as it were, the convergingpoint of all matters, even the most trivial, affecting himself. Having put the seal upon his resolution with respect to Gautran's confession, he became painfully aware that he had committed himself to a line of action from which he could not now recede without laying himself open to such suspicion, from friend and foe alike, as might fatally injure his reputation. He was a lawyer, and he knew what powerful use he could make of such a weapon against any man, high or low. If it could be turned against another it could be turned against himself. He must not, therefore, waver in his resolution. Only his conscience could call him to account. Well, he would reckon with that. It was a passive, not an active accuser. Gautran would seek some new locality, in which he would be lost to sight. As a matter of common prudence, it was more than likely he would change his name. The suspicion which attached itself to him, and the horror with which he was regarded in the neighbourhood in which he had lived, would compel him to fly to other pastures. In this, and in the silence of time, lay the Advocate's safety, for every day that passed would weaken the fever of excitement created by the trial. After a few weeks, if it even happened that Gautran were insanely to make a public declaration of his guilt, and to add to this confession a statement that the Advocate was aware of it during the trial, by whom would he be believed? Certainly not by the majority of the better classes of the people; and in the event of such a contingency, he could quote with effect the poet's words: "Be thou chaste as ice, and pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny."

So much, then, for himself: but he was more than ever anxious and ill at ease regarding Christian Almer. The secret which his friend dared not divulge to him was evidently of the gravest importprobably as terrible in its way as that which lay heavily on the Advocate's soul; and the profound mystery in which it was wrapt invested it with a significance so unusual, even in the Advocate's varied experience of human nature, that he could not keep from brooding upon it. Was it a secret in which honour was involved? He could not bring himself to believe that Almer could be guilty of a dishonourable actbut a man might be dragged into a difficulty against his will, and might have a burden

of shame unexpectedly thrust upon him which he could not openly fling off without disgrace. And yet and yet that he should be so careful in concealing it from the knowledge of the truest of friends it was inexplicable. Ponder as long as he might, the Advocate could arrive at no explanation of it, nor could his logical mind obtain the slightest clue to the mystery.

The cool air in the gardens refreshed him, and he walked about, always within view of the lights in his study windows, with his head uncovered. It was during the first five minutes of his solitude that an impression stole upon him that he was not alone. He searched the avenues, he listened, he asked aloud:

"Is any person near, and does he wish to speak to me?"

No voice answered him. The gardens, with the exception of the soft rustling of leaf and branch, were as silent as the grave. Towards the end of his solitary rambling, and as he was contemplating leaving the grounds, this impression again stole upon him. Was it the actual sound of muffled footsteps, or the spiritual influence of an unseen presence, which disturbed him? He could not decide. Again he searched the avenues, again he listened, again he asked a question aloud. All was silent.

This was the third time during the night that he had allowed himself to be beguiled. Once in Christian Almer's room, when he thought he had heard a laugh, and now twice in the solitude of the grounds. He set it down as an unreasoning fancy springing from the agitation into which he had been thrown by his interview with Gautran, and he breathed a wish that the next fortnight were passed, when his mind would almost certainly have recovered its equilibrium. The moment the wish was born, he smiled in contempt of his own weakness. It opened another vein in the psychological examination to which he was subjecting himself.

He entered his study, and did not perceive Gautran, who was asleep in the darkest corner of the room. But his quick observant eye immediately fell upon the glass out of which Gautran had drunk the wine. The glass was on his writing-table; it was not there when he left his study. He glanced at the wine-bottles on the sideboard; they had been disturbed.

"Some person has been here in my absence," he thought. "Who and for what purpose?"

He hastily examined his manuscripts and, missing none, raised the wine-glass and held it mouth downwards. As a couple of drops of red liquor fell to the ground, he heard behind him the sound of heavy breathing.

An ordinary man would have let the glass fall from his hand in sudden alarm, for the breathing was so deep, and strong, and hoarse, that it might have proceeded from the throat of a wild beast who was preparing to spring upon him. But the Advocate was not easily alarmed. He carefully replaced the glass, and wheeled in the direction of the breathing. He saw the outlines of a form stretched upon the ground in a distant corner; he stepped towards it, and stooping, recognised Gautran. He was not startled. It seemed to be in keeping with what had previously transpired, that Gautran should be lying there slumbering at his feet.

He stood quite still, regarding the sleeping figure of the murderer in silence. He had risen to his full height; one hand rested upon the back of a massive oak chair: his face was grave and pale; his head was downwards bent. So he stood for many minutes almost motionless. Not the slightest agitation was observable in him; he was calmly engaged in reflecting upon the position of affairs, as though they related not to himself, but to a client in whose case he was interested, and he was evolving from them, by perfectly natural reasoning, the most extraordinary complications and results. In all his experience he had never been engaged in a case presenting so many rare possibilities, and he was in a certain sense fascinated by the powerful use he could make of the threads of the web in which he had become so strangely and unexpectedly entangled.

Gautran's features were not clearly visible to him; they were too much in shadow. He took from his writingtable a lamp with a soft strong light, and set it near to the sleeping man. It brought the ruffian into full view. His unshaven face, his coarse, matted hair, his brutal sensual mouth, his bushy eyebrows, his large ears, his bared neck, his soiled and torn clothes, the perspiration in which he was bathed, presented a spectacle of human degradation as revolting as any the Advocate had ever gazed upon.

"By what means," he thought, "did this villain obtain information of my movements and residence, and what is his motive in coming here? When he accosted me tonight he did not know where I lived of that I am convinced, for he had no wish to meet me, and believed he was threatening another man than myself on the high road. That was a chance meeting. Is this, also, a chance encounter? No; there is premeditation in it. Had he entered another house he would have laid his hands on something valuable and decamped, his purpose being served. He would not dare to rob me, but he dares to thrust his company upon me. Of all men, I am the man he should be most anxious to avoid, for only I know him to be guilty. Have I created a monster who is destined to be the terror and torture of my life? Is he shrewd enough, clever enough, cunning enough, to use his power as I should use it were I in his place, and he in mine? That is not to be borne, but what is the alternative? I could put life into the grotesque oaken features upon which my hand is resting, and they might suggest a remedy. The branches of the tree within which these faces grew in some old forest waved doubtless over many a

mystery, but this in which I am at present engaged matches the deepest of them. Some demon seems to be whispering at my elbow. Speak, then; what would you urge me to do?"

The Unseen: "Gautran entered unobserved."

The Advocate: "That is apparent, or he would not be lying here with the hand of Fate above him."

The Unseen: "No person saw him no person is aware that he is in your study, at your mercy."

The Advocate: "At my mercy! You could have found a better word to express your meaning."

The Unseen: "You know him to be a murderer."

The Advocate: "True."

The Unseen: "He deserves death! You have already heard the whisperings of the voice which urged you to fulfil the divine law, Blood for blood!"

The Advocate: "Speak not of what is Divine. Tempter, have you not the courage to come straight to the point?"

The Unseen: "Kill him where he lies! He will not be missed. It is nightblack night. Every living being in the house, with the exception of yourself, is asleep. You have twisted justice from its rightful course. The wrong you did you can repair. Kill him where he lies!"

The Advocate: "And have the crime of murder upon my soul?"

The Unseen: "It is not murder. Standing as you are standing now, knowing what you know, you are justified."

The Advocate: "I will have no juggling. If I kill him it is not in the cause of justice. Speak plainly. Why should he die at my hands?"

The Unseen: "His death is necessary for your safety."



The Advocate: "Ah, that is better. No talk of justice now. We come to the coarse selfishness of things, which will justify the deadliest crimes. His death is necessary for my safety! How am I endangered? Say that his presence here is a threat. Am I not strong enough to avoid the peril? How vile am I that I should allow such thoughts to suggest themselves! Christian, my friend, whatever is the terror which has taken possession of you, and from which you vainly strive to fly, your secret is pure in comparison with mine. If it were possible that the secret which oppresses you concerned your dearest friend, concerned me, whom perchance it has in some hidden way wronged, how could I withhold from you pity and forgiveness, knowing how sorely my own actions need pity and forgiveness? For the first time in my life I am brought face to face with my soul, and I see how base it is. Has my life, then, been surrounded by dreams, and do I now awake to find how low and abominable are the inner workings of my nature? I must arouse this monster. He shall hide nothing from me."

He spurned Gautran with his foot. It was with no gentle touch, and Gautran sprang to his feet, and would have thrown himself upon the Advocate had he not suddenly recognised him.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### GAUTRAN AND THE ADVOCATE

"How long have I been asleep?" muttered Gautran, shaking himself and rubbing his eyes. "It seems but a minute." The clock on the mantel struck the hour of two. "I counted twelve when I was in the grounds; I have been here two hours. You might have let me sleep longer. It is the first I have enjoyed for weeks a sleep without a dream. As I used to sleep before" He shuddered, and did not complete the sentence. "Give me something to drink, master."

"You have been helping yourself to my wine," said the Advocate.

"You know everything, master. Yes, it was wine I drank, as mild as milk. It went down like water. Good for gentlemen, perhaps, but not for us. I must have something stronger." He looked anxiously round the room, and sighed and smiled; no appalling vision greeted his sight. "Ah," he said, "I am safe here. Give me some brandy."

"You will have none, Gautran," said the Advocate sternly.

"Ah, master," implored Gautran, "think better of it, I must have brandy I must!"

"Must!" echoed the Advocate, with a frown.

"Yes, master, must; I shall not be able to talk else. My throat is parched you can hear for yourself that it is as dry as a raven's. I must have drink, and it mustn't be milkwine. I am not quite a fool, master. If that horrible shadow were never to appear to me again, I would show those who have been hard on me a trick or two that would astonish them. If you've a spark of compassion in you, master, give a poor wretch a glass of brandy."

The Advocate considered a moment, and then unlocked a small cupboard, from which he took a bottle of brandy. He filled a glass, and gave it to Gautran.

"Here's confusion to our enemies," said Gautran. "Ah, this is fine! I have never tasted such before. It puts life into a man."

"What makes you drink to our enemies, Gautran?" asked the Advocate.

"Why, master, are not my enemies yours, and yours mine? We row in the same boat. If they found us out, it would be as bad for you as it would be for me. Worse, master,

worse, for you have much to lose; I have nothing. You see, master, I have been thinking over things since we met in the lane yonder."

"You are bold and impudent. What if I were to summon my servants and have you marched off to gaol?"

"What would you accuse me of? I have not stolen anything; you may search me if you like. No, no, master, I will take nothing from you. What you give I shall be grateful for; but rob you? No you are mistaken in me. I owe you too much already. I am bound to you for life."

"You do not seem afraid of the gaol, Gautran."

"Not when you threaten me with it, master, for you are jesting with me. It is not worth your while; I am a poor creature to make sport of."

"Yet I am dangerously near handing you over to justice."

"For what, master, for what? For coming into your room, and not finding you there, throwing myself in a corner like a dog?"

"It is sufficient and you have stolen my wine. These are crimes which the law is ready to punish, especially in men with evil reputations."

"You are right, I've no doubt; you know more about the law than I do. I don't intend to dispute with you, master. But when they got hold of me they would question me, and my tongue would be loosened against my will. I say again, you are jesting with me. How warm and comfortable it is in this grand room, and how miserable outside! Ah, why wasn't I born rich? It was a most unfortunate accident."

"Your tongue would be loosened against your will! What could you say?"

"What everybody suspects, but could not prove, master, thanks to you. They owe me a grudge in the prison yonder lawyers and judges and gaolers and nothing would please them better than to hear what I could tell them that I killed the girl, and that you knew I killed her. You don't look pleased, master. You drove me to say it."

"You slanderous villain!"

"I don't mind what you call me, master. I can bear anything from you. I am your slave, and there is nothing you could set me to do that I am not ready to perform. I mean it,

master. Try me only try me! Think of something fearful, something it would take a bold, desperate man to do, and see if I shrink from it. The gaoler was right when he said I was a lucky dog to get such an Advocate as you to defend me. You knew the truth you knew I did the deed you knew no one else could save me and you wanted to show them how clever you were, and what a fool any lawyer was to think he could stand against you. And you did it, master, you did it. How mad they must be with you! I wonder how much they would give to cry Quits! And you've done even more than that, master. The spirit which has been with me night and day, in prison and out of prison, lying by me in bed, standing by my side in the court you saw it there, master dogging me through the streets and lanes, hiding behind trees and gliding upon me when I thought I had escaped it it is gone, master, it is gone! It will not come where you are. It is afraid of you. I don't care whether it is a holy or an unholy power you possess, I am your slave, and you can do with me as you will. But you must not send me to prison again no, you must not do that! Why, master, simple as I am, and ignorant of the law, I feel that you are joking with me, when you threaten to summon your servants to march me off to gaol for coming into your house. I should say to them, 'You are a pack of fools. Don't you see he is jesting with you? Here have we been talking together for half an hour, and he has given me his best brandy as a mark of friendship. There is the bottle feel the rim of it, and you will find it wet. Look at the glass, if you don't believe me. Smell it smell my breath.' Why, then they would ask you again if you were in earnest, and you would have to send them away. Master, I was never taught to read or write, and there is very little I know but I know well that there is a time to do a thing and a time not to do it, and that unless a thing is done at the proper time, there is no use afterwards attempting it. I will tell you something, though I dare say I might save myself the trouble, for you can read what is in me. If Madeline, when she ran from me along the river's bank, had escaped me, it is likely she would be alive at this moment, for the fiend that spurred me on to kill her might never again have been so strong within me, might never again have had such power over me as he had that night. But he was too strong for me, and that was the time to do the deed, and she had to die. Do you think I don't pity her? I do, when she is not tormenting me. But when she follows me, as she has done tonight, when she stands looking at me with eyes in which there is fire, but no light, I feel that I could kill her over again if I dared, and if I could get a good grip of her. Are all spirits silent? Have they no voice to speak? It is terrible, terrible! I must buy masses for her soul, and then, perhaps, she will rest in peace. Master, give me another glass of that rare brandy of yours. Talking is dry work."

"You'll get no more till you leave me."

"I am to leave you, then?"

"When I have done with you when our conversation is at an end."

"I must obey you, master. You could crush me if you liked."

"I could kill you if I liked," said the Advocate, in a voice so cold and determined that Gautran shuddered.

"You could, master I know it well enough. Not with your hands; I am your match there. Few men can equal me in strength. But you would not trust to that; you are too wise. You would scorch and wither me with a lightning touch. I should be a fool to doubt it. If you will not give me brandy, give me a biscuit or some bread and meat. Since noon I have had nothing to eat but a few apples, to which I helped myself. The gaolers robbed me of my dinner in the middle of the day, and put before me only a slice of dry bread. I would cut off two of my fingers to be even with them."

In the cupboard which contained the brandy and other liquors was a silver basket containing biscuits, which the Advocate brought forward and placed before Gautran, who ate them greedily and filled his pockets with them. During the silence the Advocate's mind was busy with Gautran's words. Ignorant as the man was, and confessed himself to be, there was an undisputable logic in the position he assumed. Shrink from it as he might, the Advocate could not avoid confessing that between this man, who was little better than an animal, and himself, who had risen so high above his fellowsthat in these extremes of intellectual degradation and superiorityexisted a strange and, in its suggestiveness, an awful, equality. And what afforded him food for serious reflection, from an abstract point of view, was that, though they travelled upon roads so widely apart, they both arrived at the same goal. This was proved by Gautran's reasoning upon the Advocate's threat to put him in prison for breaking into the House of White Shadows. "Sound logic," thought the Advocate, "learnt in a school in which the common laws of nature are the teachers. A decided kinship exists between this murderer and myself. Am I, then, as low as he, and do the best of us, in our pride of winning the crown, indulge in selfdelusions at which a child might feel ashamed? Or is it that, strive as he may, the most earnest man cannot lift himself above the grovelling motives which set in motion every action of a human life?"

"Now, master," said Gautran, having finished munching.

"Now, Gautran," said the Advocate, "why do you come to me?"

"I belong to you," replied Gautran. "You gave me my life and my liberty. You had some meaning in it. I don't ask you what it is, for you will tell me only what you choose to tell me. I am yours, master, body and soul."

"And soul?" questioned the Advocate ironically.

"So long," said Gautran, crossing himself, "as you do not ask me to do anything to imperil my salvation."

"Is it not already imperilled? Murderer!"

"I have done nothing that I cannot buy off with masses. Ask the priests. If I could not get money any other way, to save myself I would rob a church."

"Admirable!" exclaimed the Advocate. "You interest me, Gautran. How did you obtain admission into the grounds?"

"Over the wall at the back. It is a mercy I did not break my bones."

"And into this room how did you enter?"

"Through the window."

"Knowing it was my room?"

"Yes, master."

"How did you gain that knowledge?"

"I was told and told, as well, that you lived in this house."

"By whom were you told?"

"As I ran from Madeline she has left me forever, I hope I came upon a man who, for some purpose of his own, was lingering on a hill a little distance from here. I sought company, and was glad of his. I made up my mind to pass my night near something human, and did not intend to leave him. But when he said that yonder was the house in which the great Advocate lived, and when he pointed out your study window, I gave him the slip, knowing I could do better than remain with him. That is the truth, master."

"Are you acquainted with this man?"

"No, I never saw him before; I saw but little of him as it was, the night was so dark; but I know voices when I hear them. His voice was strange to me."

"How happened it, then, that you conversed about me?"

"I can't remember exactly how it came about. He gave me some brandy out of a flask not such liquor as yours, master, but I was thankful for it and I asked him if he had ever been followed by the spirit of a dead woman. He questioned me about this woman, asking if she was fair and beautiful, whether she had met her death in the Rhone, whether her name was Madeline. Yes, he called her up before me and I was spellbound. When I came to my proper senses he was talking to himself about a great Advocate in the house he was staring at, and I said there was only one great Advocate you who set me free and I asked him if you lived in the house. He said yes, and that the lights I saw were the lights in your study windows. Upon that I left him, suddenly and secretly, and made my way here."

"Was the man watching this house?"

"It had the look of it. He is no friend of yours, that I can tell you. When he spoke of you it was with the voice of a man who could make you wince if he pleased. You have served him some trick, and he wants to be revenged, I suppose. But you can take care of yourself, master."

"That will do. Leave me and leave this house, and as you value your life, enter it no more."

"Then, you will see me elsewhere. Where, master, and when?"

"I will see you in no place and at no time. I understand the meaning of looks, Gautran, and there is a threat in your eyes. Beware! I have means to punish you. You have escaped the penalty of your crime, but there is no safety for you here. You do not wish to die; the guilt of blood is on your soul, and you are afraid of death. Well may you be afraid of it. Such terrors await you in the life beyond as you cannot dream of. Live, then, and repent; or die, and be eternally lost! Dare to intrude yourself upon me, and death will be your portion, and you will go straight to your punishment. Here, and at this moment only, you have the choice of either fate. Choose, and swiftly."

The cold, stern, impressive voice, the commanding figure, had their effect upon Gautran. He shook with fear; he was thoroughly subdued.

"If I am not safe here, master, where shall I find safety?"

"In a distant part of the country where you are not known."

"How am I to get there? I have no money."

"I will give you sufficient for flight and subsistence. Here are five gold pieces. Now, go, and let me never see your murderous face again."

"Master," said Gautran humbly, as he turned the money over in his hand and counted it. "I must have more not for myself, but to pay for masses for the repose of Madeline's soul. Then I may hope for forgiveness then she will leave me in peace!"

The Advocate emptied his purse into Gautran's open palm, saying, "Let no man see you. Depart as secretly as you came."

But Gautran lingered still. "You promised me some more brandy, master."

The Advocate filled the glass, and Gautran, with fierce eagerness, drank the brandy.

"You will not give me another glass, master?"

"No, murderer. I have spoken my last word to you."

Gautran spoke no more, but with head sunk upon his breast, left the room and the house.

"A vulgar expedient," mused the Advocate, when he was alone, "but the only one likely to prove effective with such a monster. It is perhaps best that it has happened. This man watching upon the hill is none other than John Vanbrugh. I had almost forgotten him. He does not come in friendship. Let him watch and wait. I will not see him."



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### PIERRE LAMONT SEEKS THE HOSPITALITY OF THE HOUSE OF WHITE SHADOWS.

The following day Pierre Lamont did not leave his bed, and was visited in his room by the Advocate and Christian Almer. To the Advocate he said:

"I trust I shall not incommode you, for I am compelled to throw myself upon your hospitality."

"Get well, then," said the Advocate, "and enjoy it which you cannot do, thus confined."

"I do not know I do not know," said the old lawyer, gazing at the Advocate, and wondering how it was possible that this profound thinker and observer could be blind to the drama which was being acted at his very door, "one can still follow the world. Have you read the papers this morning?"

"No I have not troubled myself to look at them."

"Here is one that will interest you. What is called the freedom of the press is growing into a scandal. Editors and critics abuse their charter, and need some wholesome check. But you are not likely to be moved by what they say."

He handed a newspaper to the Advocate, who walked to the window and read the editorial comments upon the trial and the part he had played in it.

"The trial of Gautran is over, and the monster whom all believe to be guilty of a foul murder is set free. The victim, unavenged, is in her grave, and a heavy responsibility lies not only upon the city, but upon the nation. Neither for good nor ill can the words we write affect the future of Gautran. Released, by the law, he is universally condemned. Justice is not satisfied. In all Switzerland there is but one man who in his soul believes the degraded wretch to be innocent, and that this man should be right and all others wrong we refuse to believe. Never in a cause so weighty have we felt it our duty to raise our voice against a verdict reluctantly wrung from the citizens whose lot it was to judge a human being accused and we insist, righteously accused of a horrible crime. The verdict cannot be disturbed. Gautran is free! There is a frightful significance in these words Gautran is free!

"Removed from the feverish excitement of the court in which the trial took place, the report of the proceedings reads more like a stage drama than an episode of real life. All the elements which led to the shameful result are eminently dramatic, and were, without doubt, planned by the great Advocate who defended the accused with an eye to dramatic effect. It would scarcely surprise us were the climax now reached to be followed by an anticlimax in which Gautran's champion of yesterday would become his accuser of today. Our courts of justice are becoming accustomed to this kind of theatrical display. Consider the profound sensation which would be produced by the great lawyer coming forward and saying, 'Yesterday, after a long and exciting struggle, I proved to you that Gautran was innocent, and by my efforts he was let loose upon society. Today I propose to prove to you that he is guilty, and I ask you to mete out to him his just punishment.' A dangerous temptation, indeed, to one who studies effect. But there is a safeguard against such a course. It would so blacken the fame of any man who adopted it, however high that man might stand in the estimation of his peers and the people, that he could never hope to rise from the depths of shame into which his own act had plunged him.

"Many persons who believe that way will doubtless argue that there is something providential in the history of this ruthless murder of an unfortunate innocent being. She is slain. Not a soul comes forward to claim kinship with her. None the less is she a child of God. Human reason leads to the arrest and imprisonment of Gautran. Providence brings upon the scene a great lawyer, who, unsolicited, undertakes the defence of a monster, association with whom is defilement. The wretch is set free, and Justice stands appalled at what has been done in the name of the law. But this is not the end. Providence may have something yet in store which will bring punishment to the guilty and unravel this tangled skein. What, then, will the great Advocate have to say who deliberately and voluntarily brought about a miscarriage of justice so flagrant as to cause every honest heart to thrill with indignation?"

The Advocate did not read any further, but laid the paper aside and said:

"Men who take part in public matters are open to attacks of this kind. There is nothing to complain of."

"And yet," thought Pierre Lamont, when the Advocate left him, "there was in his face, as he read the article, an expression denoting that he was moved. Well, well, men are but human, even the greatest."

Later in the day he was visited by Christian Almer, to whom he repeated his apologies.

"I have one of my bad attacks on me. They frequently last for days. At such times it is dangerous for me to be moved about."

"Then do not be moved about," said Almer, with a smile.

But despite this smile. Almer was inwardly disquieted. He had not been aware on the previous night that Pierre Lamont occupied the next room to his. After the departure of the Advocate, Adelaide had not been careful; her voice had been frequently raised, and Almer was anxious to ascertain whether it had reached the old lawyer's ears.

"You slept well, I hope," he said.

"Yes, until the early morning, a little after sunrise. I am a very deep sleeper for four or five hours. The moment I close my eyes sleep claims me, and holds me so securely that, were the house on fire, it would be difficult to arouse me. But the moment the sunshine peeps into my room, my rest is at an end. When I had the use of my limbs I was an early riser."

Almer's mind was relieved. "Sleeping in a strange bed is often not conducive to repose."

"I have slept in so many strange beds." And Pierre Lamont thought as he spoke: "But never in a stranger bed than this."

"You can still find occupation," said Almer, pointing to the books on table and bed.

"Ah, books, books, books!" said Pierre Lamont. "What would the world do without them? How did it ever do without them? But I am old, and I am talking to a young man."

"My father was a bookworm and a student," said Almer. "Were he alive, he would be disappointed that I do not tread in his footsteps."

"Perhaps not. He was a wise man, with a comprehensive mind. It would not do for us all to be monks."

## **CHAPTER XXXV**

### **FRITZ THE FOOL RELATES A STRANGE DREAM TO PIERRE LAMONT**

Halfadozen times in the course of the day Pierre Lamont had sent in search of Fritz the Fool, and it was not till the afternoon that Fritz made his appearance.

"You should have come earlier, fool," said Pierre Lamont with a frown.

"I was better engaged," said Fritz coolly. "You fired me with those loveverses last night, and I have been studying what to say to my peach."

"The pretty Dionetta! Rehearse, then; I am dull."

"Ah, I have much to tell you. I am thinking of saying to the peach, 'Dionetta, place your hand in mine, and we will both serve Pierre Lamont. He will give us a home; he will pay us liberally; and when he dies he will not leave us unprovided for.'"

"And if the peach should laugh in your face?"

"I would reason with it. I would say, 'Look you now; you cannot be always ripe, you cannot be always mellow and luscious. Do not waste the precious sunshine of life, but give yourself to a clever fool, who cares quite as much for your fair face and beautiful skin as he does for the diamond baubles in your ears.'"

"Diamond earrings, Fritz! Are you dreaming?"

"Not at this moment though I had a dream last night after I left you which I may tell you if I don't repent of it before I disclose it. Yes, Master Lamont, diamond earrings as I'm a living fool, diamonds of value. See, Master Lamont, I don't want this peach to be gathered yet. It is well placed, it is in favour; it is making itself in some way useful, not to finer, but to richer fruit. Heaven only knows what may be rained upon it when the very first summer shower brings a diamond finger ring, and the second a pair of diamond earrings. A diamond brooch, perhaps; money for certain, if it will take a fool's advice. And of course it will do that if, seeing that the fool is a proper fool, the peach says kindly, 'I am yours.' That is the way of it, is it not, Master Lamont?"

"I am waiting to hear more, Fritz," said Pierre Lamont, with a full enjoyment of Fritz's loquacity.

"Behind the summerhouse, Master Lamont, lies a lovely lake, clear as crystal in parts where it is not covered with fairy lilies. I am as good as a pair of eyes to you to tell you of these beauties. The water is white and shining and at one part there is a mass of willows bending over; then there is a break, clear of the shadow of branch and leaf; then there is another mass of willows. From a distance you would think that there was no break in the foliage; you have to go close to it to make the discovery, and once you are there you are completely hidden from sight. Not more than two hours ago I was passing this spot at the back of the willows, when I heard a voice a girl's voice, Master Lamont saying quite softly, 'Oh, how lovely! how beautiful how beautiful!' It was Dionetta's voice; I should know it among a thousand. Through the willows I crept with the foot of a cat till I came to the break, and there was Dionetta herself, bending over the water, and sighing, 'Oh, how lovely! how beautiful!' She could not see me, for her back was towards me, and I took care she did not hear me. She was shaking her pretty head over the water, and I shouldn't deserve to be called a fool if I had not felt curious to see what it was in the lake that was so lovely and beautiful. Perhaps it was her own face she was admiring. Well, she had a perfect right, and I was ready to join in the chorus. I crept up to her as still as a mouse, and looked over her shoulder. She gave a great scream when she saw my face in the lake, and I caught hold of her to prevent her from falling in. Then I saw what almost took away my breath. In her ears there flashed a pair of diamond earrings, the like of

which I never in my life beheld in our village. Her face got as red as a sunset as I gazed at her. 'How you frightened me, Fritz!' she said. I set the earrings swinging with my fingers and said, 'Where did you get these wonderful things from?' She answered me pat. 'My lady gave them to me.' 'They are yours, then?' I asked. 'Yes, Fritz,' she said, 'they are mine, and I came here to see how I look in them. They are so grand that I am ashamed to put them on unless I am alone. Don't tell anybody, will you, Fritz? If grandmother knew I had them, she would take them from me. She would never, never let me wear them. Don't tell anybody.' Why, of course I said I would not, and then I asked why my lady gave them to her, and she said it was because my lady loved her. So, so! thought I, as I left my peach I would like to have given her just one kiss, but I did not dare to try so, so! my lady gives her maid a pair of diamond earrings that are as suitable to her as a crown of gold to an ass's head. There is something more than common between lady and maid. What is it, Master Lamont, what is it?"

"A secret, fool, which, if you get your peach to tell, will be worth much to you. And as you and I are going to keep our own counsel, learn from me that this secret has but one of two kernels. Love or jealousy. Set your wits at work, Fritz, set your wits at work, and keep your eyes open. I may help you to your peach, fool. And now about that dream of yours. Were you asleep or awake at the time?"

Fritz stepped cautiously to the door, opened it, looked along the passage, closed the door, and came close to the bedside.

"Master Lamont," he said, "what I dreamt is something so strange that it will take a great deal of thinking over. Do you know why I tell you things?"

"I might guess wrong, Fritz. Save me the trouble."

"You have never been but one way with me; you have never given me a hard word; you have never given me a blow. When I was a boy twenty years ago and more, Master Lamont you were the only man who spoke kind words to me, who used to pat my head and pity me. For, if you remember, Master Lamont, I was nothing but a castaway, living on charity, and everybody but you made me feel it. Cuffed by this one and that one, kicked, and laughed at but never by you. Even a fool can bear these things in mind."

"Well, well, Fritz, go on with your dream. You are making me hungry."

"It came nearly two hours after midnight. At that time I was in the grounds. All was dark. There was nobody about but me, until the Advocate came. Then I slipped aside and watched him. He walked up and down, like a machine. It was not as if a man was walking, but a figure of steel. It was enough to drive me crazy, it was so like clockwork.

Twice he almost discovered me. He looked about him, he searched the grounds, still with the same measured step, he called aloud, and asked if anybody was near. Then he went into the house and into the study. I knew he was there by the shifting of the lights in the room. Being alone with the shadows, your loveverses came into my mind, and you may believe me, Master Lament, I made my way to the window of the room in which Dionetta sleeps, and stood there looking up at it. I should have been right down ashamed of myself if I hadn't been dreaming. Is it the way of lovers, Master Lamont? 'Faster than bees to flowers they wing their way;' that is how the line runs, is it not? Well, there stood I, a bee, dreaming in the dark night, before the window of my flower. An invisible flower, unfortunately. But thoughts are free; you can't put chains on them. So there stood I, for how many minutes I cannot say, imagining my flower. Now, if I had known that her pretty head was lying on the pillow, with great diamond earrings in her ears for that is a certainty I might not perhaps have been able to tear myself away. Luckily for my dream, that knowledge had still to come to me, so I wandered off, and found myself once more staring at the lights in the Advocate's study windows. Now, what made me step quite close to them, and put my eye to a pane which the curtains did not quite cover? I could see clear into the room. Imagine my surprise, Master Lamont, when I discovered that the Advocate was not alone! Master Lamont, you know every man in the village, but I would give you a thousand guesses, and you would not hit upon the name of the Advocate's friend. From where I stood I could not hear a word that was said, but I saw everything. I saw the Advocate go to a cupboard, and give this man liquor; he poured it out for him himself. Then they talked then the Advocate brought forward a silver basket of biscuits, and the man ate some, and stuffed some into his pockets. They were on the very best of terms with each other. The Advocate gave his friend some moneypieces of gold, Master Lamont; I saw them glitter. The man counted them, and by his action, asked for more; and more was given; the Advocate emptied his purse into the man's hand. Then, after further conversation, the man turned to leave the room. It was time for me to scuttle from my peephole. Presently the man was in the grounds stepping almost as softly as I stepped after him. For I was not going to lose him, Master Lamont; my curiosity was whetted to that degree that it would have taken a great deal to prevent me from following this friend of the Advocate's. 'How will he get out?' thought I; 'the gates are locked; he will hardly venture to scale them.' Two or three times he stopped, and looked behind him; he did not see me. He arrived at the wall which stretches at the back; he climbed the wall; so did I, in another and an easier part; he dropped down with a thud and a groan; I let myself to the ground without disturbing a leaf. Presently he picked himself up and walked off, with more haste than before. I followed him. He stopped; I stopped; he walked on again, and so did I. Again he stopped and cried aloud: 'I hear you follow me! Is not one killing enough for you?' And then he gave a scream so awful that the hair rose on my head. 'She is here!' he screamed; 'she is here, and is driving me to madness!' With that he took to his heels and tore through field and forest really like a madman. I could not keep up with him, and after an hour's running I

completely lost sight of him. There was nothing for me to do but to get back to the villa. I returned the way I came I had plenty to think about on the road and I was once more before the windows of the Advocate's study. The lights were still there. The Advocate, I believe, can live without sleep. I peeped through the window, and there he was, sitting at his table reading, with an expression of power in his face which might well make any man tremble who dared to oppose him. That is the end of my dream, Master Lamont."

"But the man, Fritz, the man!" exclaimed Pierre, Lamont. "I am still in ignorance as to who this strange, nocturnal visitor can be."

"There lies the pith of my dream. If I were to tell you that this man who makes his way secretly into the grounds in the darkness of the night who is closeted with the Advocate for an hour at least who is treated to wine and cake who is presented with money, and grumblingly asks for more, and gets it if I were to tell you that this man is Gautran, who was tried for the murder of Madeline, the flowergirl, and who was set free by the Advocate what would you say, Master Lamont?"

"I should say," replied Pierre Lamont with some difficulty controlling his excitement, "that you were mad, fool Fritz."

"Nevertheless," said Fritz with great composure, "it is so. I have related my dream as it occurred. The man was Gautran and no other. Can you explain that to me in one word?"

"No," said Pierre Lamont, gazing sharply at Fritz. "You are not fooling me, Fritz?"

"If it were my last word it would make no difference. I have told you the truth."

"You know Gautran's face well?"

"I was in the court every day of the trial, and there is no chance of my being mistaken. See here, Master Lamont. I can do many things that would surprise people. I can draw faces. Give me a pencil and some paper."

With a few rapid strokes he produced the very image of Pierre Lamont, sitting up in bed, with thin, cadaverous face, with high forehead and large nose; even the glitter of the old lawyer's eyes was depicted. Pierre Lamont examined the portrait with admiration.

"I am proud of you, Fritz," he said; "you have the true artist's touch."

Fritz was busy with the pencil again. "Who may this be?" he asked, holding another sketch before Pierre Lamont.



"The Advocate. To the life, Fritz, to the life."

"This is also to the life," said Fritz, producing a third portrait. "This is Gautran. It is all I can draw, Master Lamont human faces; I could do it when I was a boy. There is murder in Gautran's face; there was murder in the words I heard him speak as I followed him: 'Is not one killing enough for you?' There is only one meaning to such words. I leave you to puzzle it all out, Master Lamont. You have a wise head; I am a fool. Mother Denise may be right, after all, when she said not knowing I was within hearing that it was an evil day when my lady, the Advocate's wife, set foot in the grounds of the House of White Shadows. But it is no business of mine; only I must look after my peach, or it may suddenly be spirited away on a broomstick. Unholy work, Master Lamont, unholy work! What do you say to letting Father Capel into the mystery?"

"Not for worlds!" cried Pierre Lamont. "Priests in such matters are the rarest bunglers. No the secret is ours, yours and mine; you shall be well paid for your share in it. Without my permission you will not speak of it do you hear me, Fritz?"

"I hear you, and will obey you."

"Good lad! Ah, what would I give if I had the use of my limbs! But you shall be my limbs and my eyes my second self. Help me to dress, Fritz quick, quick!"

"Master Lamont," said Fritz with a sly laugh, "be careful of your precious self. You are ill, you know, very, very ill! You must keep your bed. I cannot run the risk of losing so good a master."

"I have a dozen years of life in me yet, fool. This dried up old skin, these withered limbs, this lack of fat, are my protection. If I were a stout, fine man I might go off at any moment. As it is, I may live to a hundred old enough to see your grandchildren, Fritz. But yes, yes, yes I am indeed very ill and weak! Let everybody know it so weak and ill that it is not possible for me to leave this hospitable house for many, many days. The medicine I require is the fresh air of the gardens. With my own eyes I must see what I can of the comedy that is being played under our very noses. I, also, had dreams last night, Fritz, rare dreams! Ah what a comedy, what a comedy! But there are tragic veins in it, fool, which make it all the more human."