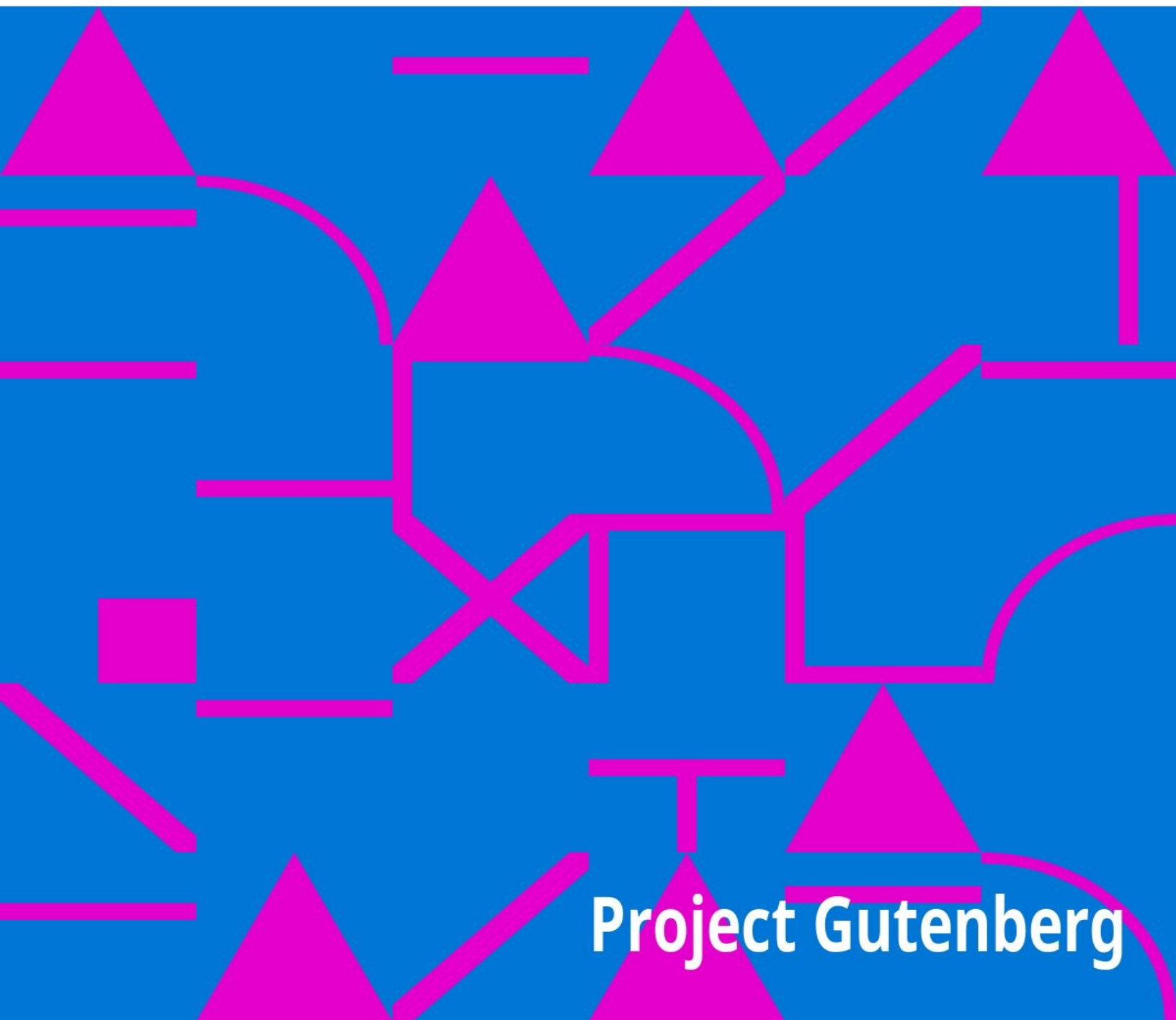


A Canadian Heroine, Volume 2

A Novel

Mrs. Harry Coghill

The lower half of the image features a solid blue background with a complex, abstract pattern of magenta geometric shapes. These shapes include various triangles, rectangles, and lines, some of which are interconnected to form larger, more complex structures. The pattern is dense and covers the entire lower half of the image.

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A CANADIAN HEROINE.

A Novel.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "LEAVES FROM THE BACKWOODS."

"Questa chiese Lucia in suo dimando,
E disse: Or ha bisogno il tuo fedele
Di te, e io a te lo raccomando."—*Inferno. Canto II.*

"Qu'elles sont belles, nos campagnes;
En Canada qu'on vit content!
Salut ô sublimes montagnes,
Bords du superbe St. Laurent!
Habitant de cette contrée
Que nature veut embellir,
Tu peux marcher tête levée,
Ton pays doit t'enorgueillir."—*J. Bedard.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET. STRAND.
1873.

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A CANADIAN HEROINE.



CHAPTER I.

Mrs. Costello had felt it a kind of reprieve when she heard from Mr. Strafford that they might delay their journey safely for a month. The sober middle age which had come upon her before its time, as her life rolled on out of the anguish and tumult of the past, made home and quietness the most desirable things on earth to her, and her health and spirits, neither yet absolutely broken, but both strained almost to the extent of their endurance, unfitted her for the changes and excitements of long travel. So she clung to the idea of delay with an unacknowledged hope that some cause might deliver them from their present terrors, and yet suffer them to remain at Cacouna.

In the meantime all went on outwardly as usual. The duties and courtesies of every-day life had to be kept up,—the more carefully because it was not desirable to attract attention. Besides, Mrs. Costello felt that an even flow of occupation was the best thing for Lucia, whom she watched, with the keenest and tenderest solicitude, passing through the shadow of that darkness which she herself knew so well. Doctor Morton brought his wife home most opportunely for her wishes. A variety of such small dissipations as Cacouna could produce, naturally celebrated the event; and Lucia as principal bridesmaid at the wedding could not, if she would, have shut herself out from them. She had, indeed, dreaded the first meeting with Bella, but it passed off without embarrassment. To all appearance Mrs. Morton had lost either the sharpness of observation or the readiness of tongue that had formerly belonged to her, for the change which Lucia felt in herself was allowed to remain unremarked.

Mrs. Bellairs had long ago got over her displeasure with Lucia. She had watched her narrowly at the time of Percy's leaving, and became satisfied that there was some trouble of a sterner kind than regret for him now weighing heavily upon her heart.

Although Mrs. Bellairs told her sister of the intended journey of Mrs. Costello and Lucia, the preparations for that journey were being made with as little stir as possible, and except herself, her husband, and Mr. Leigh, few persons dreamed of such an improbable event. Bella even received a hint to speak of it to no one but her husband, for Mrs. Costello was anxious to avoid gossip, and had taken much thought how to attain the *juste milieu* between secrecy and publicity. In the

meantime there was much to be done in prospect of a long, an indefinitely long, absence, and the needful exertion both of mind and body was good for Lucia. Under no circumstances, perhaps, could she have sat quietly down to bewail her misfortunes, or have allowed herself to sink under them, but, as it was, there was no temptation to indolent indulgence of any kind. Bitter hours came still—came especially with the silence and darkness of night, when her thoughts would go back to the sweet days of the past summer and linger over them, till some word, or look, or trifling incident coming to her memory more distinctly, would bring with it the sudden recollection of the barren, dreary present,—of the irreparable loss.

In all her thoughts of Percy there was comfort. He had loved her honestly and sincerely, and if his nature was really lower than her own, she was not likely to guess it. She had acted, in dismissing him, on a kind of distrust, she would have said, of human nature; more truly, of him; but even this distrust was so vague and so disguised that it never shadowed his character in her eyes. So, though she had parted from him, she took comfort in the thought of his love, and kept it in her heart to save herself from the overwhelming sense of degradation, which took possession of her in remembering why she had sent him away from her.

It was this feeling which, in spite of her courage and her pride, had brought to her face that look of real trouble of which Mrs. Bellairs had spoken. It was a look of which she was herself entirely unconscious, more like the effect of years of care, than like that of a sudden sorrow. With this change of expression on her face, and sobered, but cheerful and capable as ever in her ways and doings, Lucia made her preparations for leaving the place which was so dear and familiar to her.

Mrs. Costello's spirits had risen since their plans were settled. The burden which was new to Lucia had been her companion for years, and, except when the actual terror of falling once again into her husband's hands was upon her, she had come to bear it with resignation and patience. She had, of late years, endured far more on her child's account than on her own; and to find that Lucia met her share of suffering with such steady courage, and still had the same tender and clinging love for herself, was an inexpressible relief. She had faith in the words she had said on the night when the story of her life had been told, she believed that a better happiness might yet come to that beloved child than the one she had lost. So she lived in greater peace than she had done for years before.

But her greatest anxiety at this moment regarded Mr. Leigh and Maurice. She

had waited for news of Maurice's arrival in England and reception by his grandfather, before writing to him, as she had promised to do. For she wished him to be able to decide, on receiving her letter, what was the best plan for Mr. Leigh's comfort, in case he should himself be detained in Norfolk. The accounts which the first mail brought showed plainly that this would be the case. Mr. Beresford had immediately taken a fancy to his grandson, and would scarcely spare him out of his sight. Mrs. Costello, therefore, wrote to Maurice, telling him that the time she had half anticipated had really arrived, and that she and Lucia were about to leave Canada. At the same time she had a long conversation with Mr. Leigh, describing to him more of her circumstances and plans than she wished any other person to know, and expressing the regret she felt at leaving him in his solitude. A question, indeed, arose whether it would not be better for him to leave his large solitary house, and remove into the town, but this was soon decided in the negative. He would remain where he was for the present. Maurice might yet return to Canada; if not, possibly next year he might himself go to England. One circumstance made Mrs. Costello and Lucia more inclined to favour this plan—the old man's health had certainly improved. Whether it was the link to his earlier and happier life, which had been furnished by the late relenting of his wife's father, or from some other cause, he seemed to have laid aside much of his infirmity, and to have returned from his premature old age to something like vigour.

A fortnight yet remained before the cottage was to be deserted, when Doctor Morton and his wife returned home. The gossip of the neighbourhood which, as was inevitable, had been for a little while busy with Mr. Percy and Lucia, was turned into another channel by their coming, and people again occupied themselves with the bride. Lucia was obliged to visit her friend, and to join the parties given on the occasion, and so day after day slipped by, and the surface of affairs seemed so unchanged that, but for one or two absent faces, it would have been difficult to believe in all that had happened lately.

But, of course, it did at last become known that Mrs. Costello was going away. She and Lucia both spoke of it lightly, as an ordinary occurrence enough; but it was so unlike their usual habits, that each person who heard the news instantly set himself or herself to guess a reason, and, connecting it with the loss of Lucia's gay spirits, most persons came naturally to one conclusion.

It did not matter whether they said, "Poor Lucia!" with the half-contemptuous pity people give to what they call "a disappointment," or "What else could she expect?" "I told you so!" or any other of the speeches in which we express our

delight in a neighbour's misfortunes—every way of alluding to the subject was equally irritating to Mrs. Bellairs, who heard of it constantly, and tried in vain to stop the tongues of her acquaintance. She could not do it; and what she feared most, soon happened. Lucia came, in some way, to be aware of what was going on, and this last pain, though so much lighter than those she had already borne, seemed to break down all her pride at once. In her own room that night she sat, hour after hour, in forlorn wretchedness—her own familiar friends, the companions of her whole life, were making her misery the subject of their careless gossip. They knew nothing of the real wound which she had suffered, but they were quite ready to inflict another; and the feeling of loneliness and desertion which filled her heart at the thought was more bitter than all that had gone before. She remembered Maurice, and wondered drearily whether he too would have misjudged her; but for the moment even her faith in him was shaken, and she turned from her thoughts of him without comfort.

But this mood was too unnatural to last long. Before morning her courage had returned, and her strong impulse and desire was to show how little she felt the very sting which was really torturing her. She stood long before her glass that morning. The face which had grown hateful to herself was still beautiful to others. She studied it in every line. She wanted to see what there could be in it to give people the idea of love-sickness. She wanted to force back into it the old light and gaiety. Impossible! With a shudder she covered it with her hands. Never again could she be a child. She had passed through the storm, and must bear its traces henceforward. But, at least, it had been the thunderbolt of heaven, and not the hand of man, which had wounded her. Her very sorrow was sacred. She lifted up her head again, and saw that there was a calm upon her face, which was better than pride. Instinctively she knew that none but idiots could look at her with contempt, or the pity which is so near it; and she went out into her little world again, sad at heart, but steadfast and at peace. So the days passed on, and grew into weeks, and the time for their leaving Cacouna came very near. It had been delayed more than a week beyond the month on which Mrs. Costello had first counted for security; but on the very eve of their departure she had overcome her anxiety, and was secretly glad to make the most of every little excuse for lingering yet another and another day at the cottage.

It was now Monday evening, and on Wednesday they were to start. A letter from Maurice had arrived that morning—the first which he had written after receiving news from home, and it contained an enclosure to Mrs. Costello, which Lucia wondered her mother did not show her. But she would have wondered more,

perhaps, if she had known why, in spite of the easily-read wistfulness in her glance, that note was so carefully withheld from her. It alluded, in fact, too plainly to the conversation in which, for the first time, Maurice had, just before going away, spoken to Mrs. Costello of herself and his affection for her. He said now, "My father has sent me an account of Miss Latour's wedding, which he said he made Lucia describe to him for my benefit. But I have a curiosity to hear more about it, or rather about her. To tell the truth, I am longing for a letter from you, not only to bring me news of my father, but to satisfy me that all my hopes are not being built upon an impossibility. Is Percy still at Cacouna? Don't laugh at me. My occupations here leave me plenty of time to think of you all, and I depend upon you not to let me be left quite in the dark on the subject to which I cannot help giving most of my thoughts."

Mrs. Costello smiled to herself as she read; but she put off Lucia's questioning with a very unfaithful summary of the contents of the note. It was certainly strange how much vague comfort she took in the knowledge of Maurice's love for her child. It might have seemed that the same causes which had parted Lucia from Percy, and which she had said would part her from the whole world, would be just as powerful here; but the mother had at the bottom of her heart a kind of child-like confidence that somehow, some time, all must come right, and in the meantime she loved Maurice heartily, and wished for this happy consummation almost as much for his sake as for her daughter's.

CHAPTER II.

There was a good deal of difference in the aspect of the country above and below Cacouna. Below it the river bank was high; and cultivated and fertile lands stretched back for a mile or two, till they were bordered and shut in by the forest. Above, the bank was low. Just beyond the town lay the swamp, which brought ague to the Parsonage and its neighbours. On the further side of this was the steam sawmill, and a few shanties occupied by workmen; and higher still, a road (called the Lake Shore Road, because, after a few miles, it joined and ran along the side of the lake) wound its way over a sandy plain, studded with clumps and knots of scattered trees or brushwood. Rough, stubbly grass covered a good deal of the sand, but here and there the wind had swept it up into great piles round some obstacle that broke the level, and on these sand-hills wild vines grew luxuriantly, covering them in many places with thick and graceful foliage, and small purple clusters of grapes. There were pools, too, in some places, where water-lilies had managed to plant themselves, and where colonies of mud-turtles lived undisturbed; and there were shady places by the sides of the pools, where the brown pitcher-plant held its cups of clear water, and the ghost-flower glimmered spectrally among the dead leaves of last year. But the plain generally was hot and sunny in summer, and very dreary in winter; for the larger trees which grew upon it were oaks, and when they were bare of foliage, and the sand-hills and the pools had a deep covering of snow, the wind swept icily cold over its wide space. In September the oaks were still in leaf, and the grass green, and, though they were but stunted in size and coarse in texture, both were pleasant to look at. The sunshine was no longer hot, but it was serenely bright, and there was as lovely a blue overhead as if the equinox were months away.

A light waggon came winding in and out with the turnings of the road—now crossing a wooden bridge, now passing through the shadows of a dozen or more oaks which grew close together. Sometimes, when the ground was clear, the waggon went straight through one of these groups. Sometimes it turned aside, to avoid the thick brushwood underneath. The "waggon," which was neither more nor less than a large tray placed upon four wheels, and having a seat for two people, was occupied by two young men, Harry Scott and George Anderson. They were coming down from their homes, two farms which lay close together some little distance up the lake, and were going first to the sawmill and then to

the town. But they were in no particular hurry, and the afternoon was pleasant, so they let their horse take his own time, and came jogging over the sand at a most leisurely pace.

They had passed that very piece of land which had given Dr. Morton so much trouble lately; it was natural enough, therefore, that their chat should turn to speculations as to his success in ejecting Clarkson from his house, and the Indians from their fisheries.

"More trouble than it's worth," said George Anderson; "there is not a tree on the land that will pay for cutting down."

"Very likely not; but the land may not be bad; and it is a capital situation. I only wish it were mine," answered Harry, who had his own reasons for wishing to be a little more independent in circumstances.

"Tell you what," said George, making a knot on the end of his whip-lash, "my belief is, that it is quite as much for pleasure as profit that the Doctor is so busy about his land."

"Pleasure?"

"Yes. Do not you see any pleasure in it? By Jove, I asked him something about Clarkson the other day; and if you'd seen his face, you'd believe he enjoyed the fight."

"Well, that's not unlikely. He's a great brute, that Clarkson. I should not mind pitching into him myself."

"I should, though," said George laughing; "the chances of his pitching into me in return would be too strong."

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "He has a queer character certainly; but of the two, I think I should be more afraid of disturbing the Indians, especially if I had to ride about the country at all hours. It would not be very difficult to waylay the Doctor; and I dare say some of them are savage enough to do it, if they had a serious grudge against him."

"I don't believe they have pluck enough to do anything of the kind. Look what miserable fellows those are that Dawson has at the mill now. They look as if all the spirit had been starved out of them."

So they went on talking until they caught glimpses of the mill before them, whenever their way lay over the open ground; and then George Anderson touched the horse with his whip, and they began to get over the remaining distance more quickly. They were trotting briskly round the side of a low thicket of brambles, when suddenly a horse, which was grazing on the further side, raised its head and looked at them. There was nothing remarkable in that, certainly, for horses were not unfrequently turned out there; but what was remarkable, was that this one had a bridle on. George involuntarily tightened his reins; and the next moment the animal, which seemed to have been disturbed by their coming, trotted slowly across the road in front of them. It was bridled and saddled, and the saddle was a little on one side, as if it had been dragged round. Harry sprang from the waggon. He followed the horse, and in a minute or two caught and led it back to where George, who had also dismounted, was now tying his to a tree.

They both recognized the runaway. Harry said one word as he led it up, "Doctor Morton!" and with a horror-struck face pointed to a dark wet stain partly on the saddle, partly on the horse's neck.

George darted round the thicket, and in a moment a cry called Harry to the same place. A bridle path, more direct than the road, ran close beside the thorn bushes, and there, half hidden in branches and leaves, lay something—something that had once been human and living. Dark pools of blood lay about it, and there were horrible gashes and wounds as if the murderer had been unable to satisfy his rage, and had taken a frantic pleasure in mutilating his victim.

The two young men stood and looked at each other and at the ghastly heap before them. Silently with white faces they questioned each other what to do? To touch what lay there seemed almost impossible, and any thought of succour was hopeless; but something must be done. They both drew away from the spot before they spoke. Then Harry said in a low voice, "There are plenty of men at the mill; you might fetch some of them."

George went towards the waggon without a word; but just as he was going to get in he turned round,

"No, Harry, you must go. Somebody must take the news on to Cacouna, and that can't be me."

"Very well."

Harry was in the waggon instantly, and away. His first errand was quickly done. In a very few minutes George could see, from the place where he kept watch, that the men began to hurry out of the mill, and come towards him in a confused throng. Some, however, stayed to bring a kind of dray with them, and then, when these also had started, he could see Harry Scott moving slowly off in the waggon towards the town.

The dray came lumbering over the sand, and the men gathered round the dreadful heap under the brambles which must be lifted up and laid upon it, yet which no one seemed ready to be the first to touch. But, at last, it was done; the distorted limbs were smoothed and the wounds partially covered; and some semblance of humanity came back to the dead form as it was carried slowly away towards home. When this had been done, there was time for another thought—the murderer?

Perhaps every one present had already in his heart convicted one person, but even in the excitement of horror some one had sense enough to say, "There ought to be a search made—there may be some trace."

Nor was it difficult to find a trace. At a very little distance from the spot itself there appeared marks upon the grass as if footsteps, heavy, and wet with dark-coloured moisture, had trodden there. They followed the tracks, and came to a place where many low bushes growing close together formed a kind of thicket. Almost buried in this, the figure of a man lying upon the ground filled them for a moment with a new consternation—but this was no lifeless body. They dragged it out—a squalid, miserable object, with bleared eyes and red disfigured face, a drunken, half-imbecile Indian.

He was so overcome, indeed, with the heavy sleep of intoxication that even when they made him stand up, he seemed neither to see anything nor to hear the questions of the men who knew him and called him by his name. But there were answers to their questions in another shape than that of words. The hatchet that lay beside him and the stains of blood still wet upon his ragged clothing were conclusive evidence.

They led him away, after the little procession which had gone on with the dray and its load, but he neither resisted, nor indeed spoke at all. He seemed not to understand what was going on; and the men about him were for the moment too full of horror, and of that awe which belongs to the sight of death, to be much disposed to question him.

So they took murderer and victim both to the sawmill, and there waited, dreading to carry their ghastly load into the town till such warning as was possible had been given.

Meantime Harry Scott, with his mind full of his mission, drove towards Cacouna. He saw nothing of the people he passed, or who passed him; he saw only the sight he had just left, except when there rushed into his recollection for a moment the wedding-day scarcely six weeks ago, and the certainty of happiness which then seemed to wait both bride and bridegroom. And now? "Poor Bella!" broke from his lips, and he shuddered as he fancied, not Bella, but his cousin Magdalen crushed down in her youth by such a blow as this. But the momentary, fanciful connection of the two girls, did but make him the more tender of the young widow. "Widow!" he said the word half aloud, it seemed so unnatural, so incredible. But while he thought, he was drawing very near his destination; for he had at once decided that the proper thing to do was to find Mr. Bellairs, and leave him to carry the news as he might think best to his sister-in-law. At the door of the lawyer's office, therefore, the reluctant messenger stopped, and went in with his face still full of the strange excitement and trouble of his mission.

A few words can tell the happiest or the saddest news life ever brings us; all that Harry knew could be told in two sentences, and, half announced as they were by his looks, Mr. Bellairs instantly understood the message, and why it was brought to him. He took his hat, and before Harry was quite sure whether he had made him understand what had really happened, he was halfway to his own house.

An hour later, the dray, now more carefully arranged and covered, brought its load to the door of the house which had been so lately prepared for the bride's coming home. For convenience' sake they carried the body into a lower room, and laid it there until its burial, while Bella sat in her chamber above, silent and tearless, not understanding yet what had befallen her, but through her stunned and dreary stupor listening from habit for the footsteps which should have returned at that hour—the footsteps which death had already silenced for ever.

CHAPTER III.

It is easy to imagine how, in so small a community as Cacouna, the news of a frightful crime committed in their very midst, would spread from mouth to mouth. How groups of listeners would gather in the streets, round every man who had anything of the story to tell. How the country people who had been in town when the murdered man was brought home, hurried along the solitary roads with a kind of terror upon them, and carried the news out to the villages and farms around. As to the murderer, there was a strange confusion in the minds of many of the townspeople. Doctor Morton's feud with Clarkson had been so well known that, if there had been any signs of premeditation or design about the crime, suspicion would have turned naturally upon him. But there was no such appearance, nor the smallest reason to suppose that Clarkson had been within half a mile of the spot that day. On the contrary, no reasonable doubt could exist that the real murderer was the Indian who had been found among the bushes. The men who knew him spoke of him as passionate, brutal, more than half-savage—there was perfect fitness between his appearance and character, and the barbarous manner of his crime. And yet while everybody spoke of him as undoubtedly guilty, almost everybody had a thought of Clarkson haunting his mind, and an uneasy desire to find out the truth, entirely incompatible with the clearness of the circumstantial evidence.

It was already nearly nine o'clock when Margery going from the Cottage to Mr. Leigh's, on some errand to his housekeeper, brought back with her the story which a passing acquaintance had carried so far. She came into the parlour full of the not unpleasant sensation of having a piece of strange and horrible news to tell.

Mrs. Costello had left the room for a moment and Lucia was alone, sitting rather drearily looking into the fire, with her work fallen into her lap, when Margery came in.

"Miss Lucia, there's an awful thing happened."

"What, Margery?" Lucia half smiled, for Margery loved marvels, and made much of them.

"Doctor Morton is dead."

"Impossible! Hush, don't say it."

"It is true, miss. This afternoon."

"But how? It is incredible."

"He was found, Miss Lucia, lying dead by the roadside a piece beyond Dawson's mill. And they found the man that did it."

"You don't mean to say that he had been—" she stopped, shuddering.

"Murdered. Yes," and Margery went into all the details she had heard from her gossip.

Mrs. Costello, attracted by the tone of their voices, had come to the door between the parlour and her bedroom, and stood there listening. Both she and Lucia, who, like every one else except perhaps his wife, had heard of the doctor's proceedings against Clarkson, thought only of him as the murderer until Margery finished her recital with—

"It all comes of having them savages of Indians about. I never could abide the sight of them."

Lucia caught a glimpse of her mother's face. She felt her own muscles stiffen with fear. With desperate strength she steadied her voice.

"What do you mean about Indians?" she said.

"It is an Indian as done it," Margery answered half indignant. "There's no white man, let him be ever such a brute, would have chopped the body up like that."

"You said they had taken the murderer?"

"They took him, and he's in gaol. Dawson's men knew him. He has been working for Dawson lately. They say he comes from Moose Island. Mr. Strafford would know him most like."

There was nothing further to be asked, and Margery went out of the room, seeing no more than the natural horror on those two white faces of mother and daughter, which dreaded to meet and read the thought, in each other's eyes.

It was for this, then, that they had delayed their journey. Neither doubted for a moment the guilt of the wretched creature who was the haunting terror and misery of their lives; and it was not strange that, overwhelmed with the stronger

and more personal interest, they should forget to wonder or lament over the dead, cut down in the very beginning of life, or to think of the desolate and widowed bride meeting her first grief in the unnatural guise of murder.

Mrs. Costello came back to her chair by the fireside. She could no longer take her fears and anxieties into the solitude of her own room, and hide them there. There was both pain and comfort in knowing that Lucia now shared with her every additional weight—even this last, which she scarcely yet comprehended. But it was some time before either spoke. Each was trying to gauge the new depth which seemed to have opened under their feet—the wife and daughter of a murderer! The old ignominy, the old degradation, had been all but intolerable. How then should they bear this? And their secret, must it not be known now? become the common gossip of the country, of the people who had called them friends? Each felt instinctively that their thoughts were running on in the same channels, each shrank from words. Yet, it was needful to consult, to ask each other the question, "What shall we do?"

At last Mrs. Costello roused herself.

"We must put off our journey," she said, with a smothered sigh, which, indeed, had nearly been a groan.

Lucia looked up.

"It may not be true," she answered, knowing that there was no need to say what "it" was—the idea which had seized upon both their minds with so deadly a grasp.

"It may not, God grant it! But we must know; and if it is, I ought to be here."

"Mother, you cannot. It will kill you."

Mrs. Costello smiled, the wan smile of long-taxed patience.

"No," she said, "I think not. Life is hard for both of us, hardest perhaps for you, darling, just now, but I have no thought that it is over yet for either of us."

Lucia came and knelt down in her old place by her mother's side. It always seemed as if thus close together, able to speak to each other as much by caresses as by words, they were both stronger, and could look more calmly at the calamities which threatened them with every evil except that of separation.

"You will write to Mr. Strafford?" Lucia asked.

"Yes; but first we must know certainly."

"And how to do that?"

"There will be no difficulty to-morrow. Mr. Leigh is sure to hear the particulars. I will go and ask him about them."

"You do not mean to tell him?"

"No; it will be easy enough without that, to ask about a subject which every one will be talking of."

"Mamma, I can go to Mr. Leigh as well as you. I can go better, for I shall not suffer as you will, and I can bring you home a faithful account of what I hear."

"Darling, all this is new to you. I have had to serve a long apprenticeship to learn self-restraint."

Lucia laughed bitterly. "See the advantage of my Indian blood," she said. "Trust me, mother, I will be as steady as those ancestors of mine who bore torture without flinching."

Mrs. Costello bent down and kissed her child's forehead.

"Yours is a better heroism, Lucia; for mental pain is harder to bear than physical, and you would suffer to save me."

"We suffer together, mamma. I must take my share. To-morrow I shall go, as usual, to Mr. Leigh's, and bring back all I can learn. But he will wonder to see me, and still more if he hears that we are not going away."

"You must simply tell him our journey is put off. He will ask no questions, and only think I am very dilatory and changeable. No one else is likely to think of us at all for a day or two to come."

They were silent again for a little while. Lucia's thoughts, relieved from the first heavy pressure on them by the very fact of having spoken, began to turn from the criminal to the victim; from their own share in the horror to that of others. One thing seemed to stand out clear and plain from the confusion which still enveloped all else. She, the daughter of the murderer, could never again meet the wife of the murdered man as a friend. If the punishment of the father descended

to the children, did not their guilt descend too? Already she seemed to feel the stain of blood upon her hand, and to shrink from herself, as all innocent persons ought to do, henceforward. And Bella, her old companion and friend, must shrink from her most of all; the very spirit of the dead would surely rise up to forbid all intercourse between them.

Lucia had not boasted of her self-command without reason. A mind naturally strong, and supported both by pride and affection, had enabled her to meet with courage the bitterness and misery of the past weeks. But she was only a girl still, and had not learned to rule her thoughts as well as her looks and words. So if they grew morbid, and her dreary imagination sometimes tortured her uselessly and cruelly, it was no great wonder. She could suffer and be silent; but she had not yet learnt so to rule her spirit as to save herself needless suffering.

Thus the very intensity of her sympathy for Bella only reacted in loathing and horror of herself; and she had begun to try to devise means for carrying out that avoidance of all most nearly connected with the dead, which seemed to her an imperative duty, when she was startled by her mother's voice.

"If it is he," she said—and it seemed that they both shrank from any plainer expression of their thoughts than these vague phrases—"if it is he our hardest task is before us. How will you bear, Lucia, to meet them all again?"

"Mother, I cannot! Surely you do not think of it. How can we"—she shuddered as she spoke—"how can we go again among any innocent people?"

"My child, we *must*. More than that, we must keep our secret, if we can, still."

"But Bella? Mother, how can I look at her—a widow—and know who I am, and who has done it?"

"Listen to me, Lucia. My poor child, your burden has been heavy lately; do not make it heavier than it need be. The crime and the horror are bad enough, but we have no share in them. No; think of it reasonably. The wife and child of a criminal, even where there has been daily association between them, are not condemned, but rather pitied. No mind, but one cruelly prejudiced, would brand them with his guilt. Do not punish yourself, then, where others would acquit you. But, indeed, I need not tell you how our very separation is a safeguard to us—to you especially. Think of these things; and do not suffer yourself to imagine that there is a bar between you and Bella just now, when I know you love her more than ever."

Lucia's head lay upon her mother's knee. Mrs. Costello's touch on the soft hair, her tone of gentle reproof, and the thoughts her words called up, brought tears, fast and thick, to her child's eyes. Lucia had shed few tears in her life. Until lately she had known no cause for them; and lately they had not come. With dry eyes and throbbing temples she had gone through the most sorrowful hours; but now the spell seemed broken, and a sense of calm and relief came with the change. Mrs. Costello went on,—

"There is another reason why we must appear as we have always done. Suspicion is not proof. Margery's story, and more, may be true, and yet it may be that, three months hence, all, as regards ourselves, will be just as it has been. We must not, through a blind fear of one calamity, put ourselves in the way of another. Neither of us can look much at the future to-night; but we must not forget that there is a future. So it is still the old task which is before us, to keep our secret."

The voice had been very steady until the last word; but as that was spoken, it faltered and failed so suddenly that Lucia looked up. She sprang to her feet, but just in time. The over-tried strength had given way, and Mrs. Costello had fallen back in a deep fainting fit.



CHAPTER IV.

Lucia dared not call Margery to her assistance. The consciousness of having something to conceal made her dread the smallest self-betrayal. She hastened, therefore, to do alone all that she could do for her mother's recovery; but it was so long before she succeeded that she grew almost wild with terror. At last, however, the deathly look passed away, and with the very first moment of returning animation, the habit of self-control returned also. Mrs. Costello smiled at her daughter's anxious face.

"I am afraid," she said, "that you will have to get used to these attacks. Do not be frightened; you see they pass off again."

"But you never used to have them?"

"No; but youth and strength cannot last for ever."

"Mamma! you are not old; you are not much more than forty yet."

"Forty-two in years; but there are some years that might count for ten."

"It is this horrible pressure upon you; you are being tortured to death!"

"Hush, my child. What I suffer is but the just and natural consequence of what I did. Be patient, both for me and for yourself. By-and-by we shall see that all is right."

Hard doctrine! and only to be learnt by long endurance. Lucia rebelled against it, but she could not argue with her mother's pale face and faintly spoken words to oppose her. She busied herself softly in such little offices as her anxiety suggested, and they spoke no more that night of the subjects nearest to their hearts.

But when Mrs. Costello was alone, she began to think of Maurice. She felt, even before she began to think, that something which had been a stay and prop to her hitherto had suddenly been snatched away, and she had now to realize that this support was her confidence in him. For a long time she had grown accustomed to rest upon the idea that a safe and honourable future was secured for her child, and this had made present trials and difficulties endurable. She had seen Percy's

courtship with bitter disappointment, although she had miscalculated its issue, and through all her sympathy with Lucia, she had secretly rejoiced at his dismissal; she had felt no scruples in hearing from Maurice, at the very moment when his prospects had suddenly changed and brightened, the assurance of his attachment, and she had received his note that very day with a joy which almost resembled that which a girl feels who hears from his own lips that her absent lover is faithful to her. To this mother, cut off from every tie but that of motherhood, her child was the one only absorbing interest; she had loved Maurice, but she knew now that she had loved him chiefly as the representative of Lucia's future safety and happiness. It had never occurred to her that her own strange marriage, that the race or the character of her husband, which had been recognized by both mother and daughter as insuperable obstacles in Percy's case, would estrange the nobler and truer nature. The whole miserable story would have to be told, she had thought, when the time came, but she had neither feared its effect on Maurice nor felt any compunction at the idea of his carrying into an honourable family a wife whose parentage was her terror and disgrace.

But now that the disgrace had grown immeasurably darker, now that her story might have to be told, not privately and with extenuation, but in coarse hard words, and to the whole of the little world that knew her; now that every one who would, might be able to point at her as the daughter of a murderer,—how would it be?

With the feeling that at length she was indeed left alone and helpless, Mrs. Costello put from her the last fragment of her dream. There was still, it is true, the want of positive knowledge that Christian was the criminal, but in her own heart she had already accepted the evidence against him, and it seemed to her that all which remained to be done with regard to Maurice was to write and tell him, not all the truth—there was no need for that, and he might hear it soon enough from other sources—but that the hopes they had both indulged in had deceived them, and must be laid aside and forgotten.

And when her long meditation came to an end, she said softly to herself,

"Thank God, *she* does not know. And I have been ready to complain of the very unconsciousness which has saved her this!"

Mr. Leigh was surprised, as Lucia had expected, when she went next day, just as usual, to pay him her morning visit. He was easily satisfied, however, with the slight reasons she gave him for their delay, and glad of anything that kept them

still at the Cottage.

There was no need for her to ask any questions about the event of yesterday. All that was known by every one had been told to Mr. Leigh already by an early visitor, and he, full of horror and sympathy, was able to tell the terrible story over again to a listener, whose deep and agonizing interest in it he never suspected.

But to stay, after the certainty she sought for was obtained; to talk indifferently of other matters; to regulate face and voice so as to show enough, but not too much, of the tumult at her heart, was a task before which Lucia's courage almost gave way. Yet it was done. No impatience betrayed her, no sign of emotion beyond that of natural feeling for others was allowed to escape her; only her hands, which lay quietly clasped together in her lap, gradually tightened and contracted till the pressure of her slight fingers was like that of iron.

At last she was released; and exhausted as if with hard physical exertion, she came back to the Cottage with her news.

There was no need to tell it. The hopeless look which, when she dared be natural, settled in her eyes, told plainly enough that there was no mistake of identity. Only one hope remained, and that so feeble that neither dared to acknowledge it in her heart, though she might speak of it as existing—the hope that after all the prisoner might be innocent.

Mrs. Costello wrote that day to her faithful friend and counsellor, Mr. Strafford.

"I am in a terrible strait," she said, "and it is to you only in this world that I can look for aid. My whole life, as you know, has been given to my daughter—for her I have thought and planned, and in her I have had my daily consolation. But now I begin to remember that I am not a mother only, but also a wife. Have I a right to forget it? Can anything excuse a wife who does so? Tell me what I ought to do; for if ever I am to think of my husband it must be now.

"Yet it seems to me that, for Lucia's sake, I must still, if possible, keep my secret. I long to send her away from me, at this moment, but she has no friends at a distance from Cacouna, and besides, our separation would certainly excite notice. I might, indeed, send her to England; my cousin, I believe, would receive her for a while; but there, you know, I cannot follow her, and a long parting is more than I have courage to think of. So I come back to the same point from which I started. I am almost bewildered by this new wretchedness that has fallen

upon us; and I wait for your sympathy and counsel with most impatient eagerness."

She had not, however, to wait long. The country post, always irregular, for once favoured her anxiety, and only two days afterwards came a hurried note, bringing the best possible answer. Mr. Strafford wrote,

"The fact of one of my people being in such trouble would bring me to Cacouna if I had no other reason for coming. I shall be with you, therefore, the day after you receive this. No one, I should think, need, for the present at least, know of any connection whatever between your family affairs and my visit. My errand is to try what can be done for the unhappy prisoner, and, as an old friend, I shall ask your hospitality during my stay. Then I will give you what advice and help I can; of my truest and warmest sympathy I need give you no assurance."

To both mother and daughter this note brought comfort, though Lucia had no knowledge whatever of the many thoughts regarding her father which had begun to occupy her mother's mind. To her, strange and unnatural as it may seem, he was simply an object of fear and abhorrence. She hated him as the cause of her mother's sufferings, of their false and insecure position, and of the self-loathing which possessed her when she thought of their relationship. The idea of any wifely duty owing to him could never have struck her, for what visions of married life she had, belonged to a world totally unlike that of her parents' experience, and she regarded what she knew of that as something beyond all reach of ordinary rules or feelings.

Yet much as she would have wondered had she known it, her mother's thoughts were coming to be hour by hour more occupied with that long unseen and dreaded husband, who had indeed been her tyrant, but who was still bound to her by ties of her own weaving, and who was the father of her child. A strange mixture of feelings had taken the place of her old fear and disgust; there was still horror, especially of the new guilt which separated him more than ever from her purer world, but there was a deep and yearning pity also. She felt sure, before Mr. Strafford arrived, that he would tell her she was right; that Christian—even by the very act which had put him out of the ranks of ordinary men, out of the place, low and degraded as it was, which he had filled among his own people—had recovered a claim upon her, and that she must not fail to give him in his need what succour might be possible. She was right, and Lucia heard with dismay that their secret was about to be betrayed to the very person from whom most of all it had hitherto been kept.

Nothing, however, was to be done rashly. Mr. Strafford arrived late in the evening, and next day he proposed to go to the jail to see Christian, which he knew there would be no difficulty in doing, and to bring back to Mrs. Costello such an account as would enable her to judge how far her interference might or might not be useful. There was still a chance that it might be useless, and to that hope Lucia clung with a pertinacity which added to her mother's anxieties.

In the three days which had now passed since the murder, the minds even of those most nearly concerned had had time to rally a little from the first shock, and to begin to be conscious of the world around them going on just as usual in spite of all. Doctor Morton had been to a singular degree without relatives. An old and infirm uncle, living a long distance from Cacouna, was almost the only person connected with him by blood; it was to her own family alone, therefore, that Bella had to look for the deepest sympathy. But the whole neighbourhood had known her from a child; and in her great grief every one seemed ready to claim a share. All the kindness and goodness of heart which in ordinary times was hidden away under the crust of each different character, flowed out towards the young widow, and as she sat in her desolate house, sorrow seemed to invest her with its royalty, and to transform her old friends into loyal subjects, eager to do her but the smallest service.

And in the midst of this universal impulse of sympathy, and of the reverence which great suffering inspires, it was impossible for the Costellos to remain apart. Their own share in the misery did not prevent them from feeling for the others who knew nothing of their partnership; and Lucia forgot to accuse herself of hypocrisy when she was admitted into the darkened room, where her once gay companion sat and watched with heavy eyes the passing of those first days of widowhood. No one would have recognized Bella Latour now. She sat, wan and half-lifeless, caring for nothing except now and then to draw round her more closely a great shawl in which she was wrapped, as if the only sensation of which she was still capable were that of cold. Hour after hour she neither spoke nor moved, until her sister, alarmed, and anxious by any means to arouse her from her stupor, implored Lucia to see her, to try to make her speak or shed the tears which, since she had seen the body of her husband, seemed to be frozen up.

Mrs. Bellairs had not been mistaken in hoping for some good result from Lucia's visit. At the sight of her a flood of colour rushed to Bella's deathlike face, and she half rose to meet her; but when she felt the long tender kiss which had a whole world of tender pity in its silent language, she turned suddenly away, and throwing herself upon a couch, sobbed with the passionate vehemence of a child.

From that moment she was eager to keep Lucia with her. She did not care to speak, but the sight of one so associated with her lost happiness seemed a consolation to her; and thus, with her own heavy weight of uncertainty and distress, the poor girl had to take up and bear patiently such share as she could of her friend's. After the first, too, there came back such a horrible sensation of being a kind of accessory to the crime which had been committed, that the mere sight of Bella's face was torture to her.

In this way the day of Mr. Strafford's arrival and the next one, that of his first visit to the jail, passed with Lucia. It was not until quite evening that she could leave the closed-up house and its mistress; and never had a road seemed so long to her as that from Cacouna to the Cottage. Her mind, roused into feverish activity, recurred to the night when she had met Percy on that very road; she saw again, in imagination, the figure of the Indian—of her father, as she now believed—rising up from the green bank. She saw Percy, and heard his words, and then remembered with bitter shame and anger that the brutal creature from whom he had saved her, had nevertheless had power to separate them for ever. And to this creature her mother thought herself still bound! She grew wild with impatience to know the result of Mr. Strafford's mission.



CHAPTER V.

Lucia came with flushed cheeks and beating heart into the presence of her mother and Mr. Strafford. She longed to have her question answered at once, yet dreaded to ask it. They were waiting tea for her; and the bright cheerful room, with its peaceful home-look, the table and familiar tea-service, the perfectly settled and calm aspect of everything about, struck upon her disturbed fancy with a jarring sense of unfitness. But in a very little while the calm began to have a more reasonable effect; and by the time tea was over, she was ready to hear what had been done, without such an exaggerated idea of its importance, as she had been entertaining during her long hours of suspense.

Yet still she did not ask; and after a little while, Mrs. Costello said,

"Mr. Strafford has been all the afternoon in Cacouna. I have scarcely had time yet to hear all he had to tell me."

Lucia glanced at her mother and then at their friend; she was glad the subject had been commenced without her, and only expressed by her eyes the anxiety she felt regarding it.

Mr. Strafford looked troubled. He felt, with a delicacy of perception which was almost womanly, the many sided perplexities increasing the already heavy trial of Mrs. Costello's life. He grieved for the child whom he had known from her birth now plunged so young into a sea of troubles, and as he saw how bravely and steadily she met them, his desire to help and spare her grew painfully strong. If he could have said to them both, "Go, leave the miserable wretch to his fate, and find a home where you will never need to fear him again," he would have done it with most genuine relief and satisfaction; but he could not do so—at least, not yet; and duty was far from easy at that moment.

"Yes," he said as cheerfully as he could, in answer to Lucia's glance. "I have been in Cacouna for some hours to-day and I shall be there again to-morrow. I own, Lucia, I have not unlimited faith in circumstantial evidence."

Lucia started, and her heart seemed to give a great leap—could he mean that the prisoner was innocent? A week ago she would have said that the burden of disgrace lay upon them too heavily to be much increased by anything that could

happen, and now she knew by the wild throb of hope how its weight had been doubled and trebled since the shadow of murder had been hanging over them. But the hope died out at once, for there was nothing in her mind to feed it, and she had sunk back into her enforced quiet before she answered,

"Will you tell me what the evidence is, if you have heard at all exactly, and what you have seen to-day?"

There was nothing of girlish excitement or agitation in her words or tone. Mr. Strafford wondered a little, but at once did as she asked.

"The evidence appears to be very simple and straightforward. From the way in which the crime was committed and the body found, there is no reason to suppose that it had been planned beforehand. The mode in which death was inflicted showed, on the other hand, that it was not the result of a hasty or chance blow—but really a murder, though unpremeditated. Quite near to the place where the body lay, a man was found hidden among the bushes. His hands and clothes were marked with blood; he had by him a hatchet which had all the appearance of having been used to inflict the wounds on the murdered man, and a heavy stick which might well have given the first blow. His being but clumsily hidden is accounted for easily, for he was evidently intoxicated; and lastly, he is known to have been connected with a party of smugglers who used to land their goods on Beaver Creek, and who had reason to dislike Doctor Morton."

A deeper breath, a slight relaxing of the closed lips, were the only signs from either mother or daughter how this brief and clear account, riveting as it did upon their minds the certainty of guilt, had been endured as people endure the necessary torture of the surgeon's knife. Neither spoke, but waited for what was to follow.

Mr. Strafford's tone changed. "I have told you what you will have to hear from others," he said; "and, without doubt a stronger case would be difficult to find. Unless something new should come to light, I do not think many people will even feel the least uncertainty on the subject. But I do."

He paused, and then went on; not, however, without keeping an anxious watch on the faces opposite to him, lest his touch, however gentle, should press too hardly upon their quivering nerves.

"In the first place it appears that there is a man on whom, if this prisoner could be cleared, suspicion would naturally fall. This man, Clarkson, I dare say you

know by repute far better than I do, who never heard of him till to-day; but he appears to have so bad a character that no one would be shocked or surprised to hear that he was the murderer. He had also a much stronger ill-will against Doctor Morton than any one else, either Indian or white man, can be shown to have had. But yet there is such an entire absence of any proof whatever that he did commit the crime, that unless I wanted you to understand *all* my reasons for uncertainty, I would not speak of him even here in connection with it.

"My next reason seems almost as shadowy as this; but it has considerable weight with me, nevertheless. It is, that I believe the man who is in prison for the murder has neither strength of body nor of nerve to have committed it."

He stopped as Mrs. Costello uttered a broken exclamation of surprise.

"You would not know him," Mr. Strafford said gently, answering her look. "He has changed so much since I saw him not many weeks ago, that even I scarcely did so. They tell me that he has had an attack of fever while he was in the bush, and that he was but half recovered from it when he came back with the rest of the gang, a week ago."

"And since then," Mrs. Costello asked, "where has he been?"

"Not where he was likely to regain much strength. He and the other Indians have been living in one of the shanties close to the mill. It is extremely swampy and unhealthy there, and besides that, he seems to have been almost without food, living upon whisky."

Lucia shuddered still; but the wretched picture softened her, nevertheless. A feeling of compassion for the first time stole into her heart for the miserable creature who was her father.

"But that day," she said; "do you know anything of that day?"

"He seems to have been doing nothing—indeed I believe he had been incapable of doing anything—for two or three days. That morning his companions went out and left him lying on his bed asleep; they did not see him again till after he was in custody."

"Did you question him? What does he say?"

"He says nothing. He remembers nothing. He seems to me to have been suffering that day from a return of his fever, and besides that, he had had some

whisky—very little would overcome a man in his condition—so that if he crawled out into the sunshine, and finally lay down among the bushes to sleep, it is perfectly credible that the murder might have been committed close to him without his knowing anything about it."

"But the hatchet? Was it not his?"

"Yes. But he denies—whatever his denial may be worth—that the heavy stick which was found by him, ever was his; and though it is a hard thing to say, it can be imagined that the very things which fasten suspicion on him may have been arranged for that purpose by another person."

"He does say something on the subject then, since he denies the stick being his? Did he talk to you willingly on the subject?" asked Mrs. Costello.

Mr. Strafford answered her question by another.

"Have you courage and strength to see him?"

"Yes; if you think it well for me to do so."

Lucia caught her mother's hand.

"You have not, mamma, you must not go! Mr. Strafford, she cannot bear the exertion."

"You do not know what I can bear, my child. Certainly this, if it is needful or advisable."

"You will find it less trying in some ways than you perhaps expect," Mr. Strafford went on, "and in others more so. There is nothing in the man you will see to remind you of the past, and yet my great reason for thinking it well for you to see him is a hope that you may be able to recall the past to him, so as to bring him back to something like clearness of comprehension. It seems as if nothing less would do so."

"What do you mean? Does not he know you?"

"I can scarcely tell. I do not know why I should not tell you plainly the truth, which you will have to hear before you see him. His mind is either completely gone, or terror and imprisonment have deadened it for the time. The other men who have been working with him say that he was sane enough when he was sober up to the time of the murder. Certainly he is not sane now. But that may

well be a temporary thing caused by his illness and the confinement."

Mrs. Costello had covered her face with her hands.

"And you think," she said, looking up, "that the sight of me might bring back his recollection. But is there anything to be gained by doing so if we succeed? Is not his insanity the best thing that could happen?"

"I think not in this case. People seem to have made up their minds that he was sane enough, on that day, to be accountable for what he did; and if we could only recall him to himself, he might be able to give us some clue to the truth."

"I will go then," she answered; and Lucia saw that it would be only inflicting useless pain, to make any further objections. But she was not satisfied.

Mr. Strafford saw her concerned and uneasy look, and said,

"It is an experiment worth trying, Lucia. If it does not succeed, I promise that I will not recommend it to be repeated."

"But, Mr. Strafford, all Cacouna will know of my mother's going to the jail—she who never goes anywhere."

"That has been the great difficulty in the way, certainly, but I think we can manage it. The jailer, Elton, is a good man, and truly concerned about the condition of his prisoner. He talked to me to-day about him so compassionately, that I asked whether it would be possible for any one residing in the town to be allowed to visit him. He said any one I chose to bring with me should see him, and therefore there need be no gossip or surprise at your mother going, first of all."

There was no more to be said; and each of the three was glad to let the conversation drop and try to turn their thoughts to other and less painfully absorbing subjects. But to mother and daughter all other subjects were but empty words; memory in the former, and imagination in the latter were busy perpetually with that one who, by the laws of God and man, ought to have been the third at their fireside—who had been for years a vagrant and an outcast, and was now the inmate of a murderer's cell. Innocent perhaps—and it was strange how that possibility seemed slowly but surely to grow in both their minds; shadowing over, and promising by-and-by to dim in their remembrance the hideous recollections of the past.

Mr. Strafford's words had thus already begun to bear fruit. As for himself, the doubt he had expressed was merely a doubt—a matter of speculation, not of feeling. Still, while it remained in his mind, it was a sufficient reason for using every possible means of discovering the truth, and scarcely needed the additional impulse given by his warm regard for Mrs. Costello and Lucia, to induce him to devote himself, as far as his other duties would allow, to the unfortunate Christian. He was anxious to bring the long separated husband and wife together, not merely for the reason he had spoken of, but because he thought that if their meetings promised comfort or benefit to the prisoner, it would be his wife's duty to continue them; while if they proved useless, she might be released from all obligation to remain at Cacouna.



CHAPTER VI.

The change which had taken place in the fortunes of Maurice Leigh was one that might have dazzled him a little, if he had not had a strong counteracting influence in the thought of all he had left in Canada. He found himself, without hesitation or difficulty, but with a suddenness which was like the transformations in a fairy tale, changed from a Backwoods farmer's son into an important member of an old and wealthy family. Only the other day he had been working hard and holding up to himself as the reward of his work, the hope of becoming a successful provincial lawyer; now he was the heir, and all but the actual possessor, of a splendid fortune and an estate which gave him a foremost place among English country gentlemen.

His arrival at Hunsdon, his grandfather's house, had been a moment of some embarrassment both to him and to Mr. Beresford. Each had some feeling of prejudice against the other, yet each felt that it was only by having a mutual liking and regard that they could get on comfortably together. Happily their very first meeting cleared up all doubts on the subject. Mr. Beresford instantly decided that a grandson who so strongly resembled his own family, and who even in the backwoods had managed to grow up with the air and manner of a gentleman, would be, in a year or two, quite qualified to become Squire of Hunsdon, and that in the meantime he would be a pleasant companion.

Maurice, on the other hand, forgot his grandfather's former harshness, and reproached himself for his unwillingness to come to England, when he saw how solitary the great house was, and how utterly the feeble and paralytic old man was left to the care and companionship of servants. He wondered at first that this should be so, for the rich generally have no want of friends; but the puzzle soon explained itself as he began to know his grandfather better. Mr. Beresford had been a powerful and very active man; he had been proud of his strength and retained it to old age. Then, suddenly, paralysis came, and he was all at once utterly helpless. His son was dead, his granddaughter married, and away from him; his pride shrank from showing his infirmity to other relatives. So he shut the world out altogether, and by-and-by the loneliness he thus brought upon himself, growing too oppressive, he began to long for his daughter's children.

The moment Maurice came, and he was satisfied that he should like him, he

became perfectly content. His property was entirely in his own power, and one of his first proceedings was, rather ostentatiously, to make a will which was to relieve him of all future trouble about its disposal; his next to begin a regular course of instruction, intended to fit his grandson perfectly for the succession which was now settled upon him.

In this way, two or three weeks passed on, and Maurice grew accustomed to Hunsdon and to the sober routine of an invalid's life. It was not a bright existence, certainly. The large empty house looked dreary and deserted; and the library to which Mr. Beresford was carried every morning, and where he lay all day immovable on his sofa, had the quiet dulness of aspect which belongs to an invalid's room. There had been some few visitors since Maurice's arrival, and what neighbours there were within a reasonable distance seemed disposed to be as friendly as possible; but still the monotony of this new life left him enough, and more than enough, leisure for speculations on the past and future, which had a large mixture of disturbing and uneasy thoughts to qualify their brightness. He waited, too, with considerable curiosity for the return of his cousin, who, with her husband, was away from home when he arrived. She had married a neighbouring baronet, and when at home was a frequent visitor at Hunsdon; and this was all that Maurice could learn about her.

But one morning, as he sat with Mr. Beresford, and the usual daily conversation, or rather lecture, about some affairs connected with the management of the estate was in full progress, a pony-carriage swept past the windows and stopped at the door.

"It is Louisa," said Mr. Beresford, and the next minute the door of the room opened, and a little woman came in. She was so very little, that if she had chosen, she might have passed for a child; but she had no such idea. On the contrary, she had a way of enveloping herself in sweeping draperies and flowing robes that gave her a look of being much taller and infinitely more dignified than Nature had intended. She came in, in a kind of cloud, through which Maurice only distinguished an exceedingly pretty bright face, and a quantity of fair hair, together with a sort of soft feminine atmosphere which seemed all at once to brighten the dull room as she went straight up to her grandfather's sofa, and bent down to give him a kiss.

"So you are come back?" Mr. Beresford said. "But you see, I have somebody else now. Here is your cousin Maurice."

Lady Dighton turned round and held out her hand. "I am very glad to see my cousin," she said. "It was quite time you had somebody to take care of you."

She had a gay, careless manner, but her smiling eyes took a tolerably sharp survey of the stranger nevertheless, and she was not ill satisfied with the result. "He is very good-looking," she said to herself, "and looks *nice*. Of course he must be very countrified, but we will help him to rub that off." So she took him under her patronage immediately. She said no more to him, however, at present, but occupied herself with her grandfather, asking a great many questions, and telling him of the places and people she and her husband had seen during their two months' tour. Mr. Beresford was interested and amused; the little lady possessed one decided advantage over Maurice, for she and her grandfather belonged entirely to the same world, though to two different generations, and could enter into the same subjects and understand the same allusions. While they talked, Maurice had an opportunity of looking more deliberately at his cousin. He liked her small graceful figure, her tiny hands, and bright sunshiny face, with its frame of almost golden hair arranged in full soft puffs; he liked the air of daintiness and refinement about her dress, and the musical sound of her voice as she talked. He admired her the more, perhaps, because she was quite unlike the type of woman which was, in his thoughts, beyond admiration. But it did occur to him how lovely Lucia would look, with the same advantages of wealth and station as Lady Dighton, and a delicious vision swept past him, of the old house brightening up permanently, under the reign of a beautiful mistress.

He had not many minutes, however, for fancies; the most important news on both sides having been exchanged, the other two were coming to subjects in which he could join, and went on smoothly and pleasantly enough till luncheon. After that meal Mr. Beresford always went to sleep; it was generally Maurice's holiday, when he could ride or walk out without fear of being missed, but to-day he only strolled out on the long portico in front of the house, while Lady Dighton went to have a chat with the housekeeper.

Presently, however, a gleam of bright colour appeared at the hall door, and Maurice went forward and met her coming out.

"Shall I get you a shawl?" he said; "it is not very warm here."

"No, thank you; I like the cool air. I want to come out and talk to you, for grandpapa takes up all my attention when I am with him."

They began walking slowly up and down under the stone colonnade, which had

been added as a decoration to the front of the dark red brick house, and Lady Dighton went on talking.

"I was so glad when I heard you were here. Ever since poor papa's death I have felt quite uncomfortable about grandpapa. I came over to see him as often as I could, but, of course, I had to think of Sir John."

"And Dighton is a good way from here?" Maurice said. He had not been quite sure whether his cousin would not regard him as an interloper, coming between her and her inheritance; and he was still sufficiently in the dark, to feel the subject an awkward one.

"Only six miles, fortunately. I say fortunately, *now*, because I hope we are going to be very good friends, but till I saw you, I was not sure whether it was fortunate. It is so disagreeable to have near neighbours whom one does not like, especially if they are relations."

Her frankness was amusing, but not very easy to answer. However, the two or three words he found for the occasion did perfectly well.

"You are exactly like the Beresfords," she went on, "and that I know must please grandpapa. He never liked me because I am like my mother's family. I don't mean that he is not fond of me in one way; I only mean that my being like the St. Clairs instead of like the Beresfords is one reason why he would never have left Hunsdon to me when there was anybody else to leave it to."

Maurice felt a little relieved and enlightened. His cousin then had never expected to inherit Hunsdon; he took courage on that, to ask a question.

"But as he could not have thought until lately of making a child of my mother's his heir, who was supposed to stand next in succession to my uncle?"

Lady Dighton gave a little sigh to the memory of her father.

"Grandpapa always wished him to marry again," she said. "Mamma died six years ago; then I was married, and from that time I know perfectly well that grandpapa was continually looking out for a new daughter-in-law. He was disappointed, however; I do not think myself that papa would have married. At any rate he did not; and then, nearly two years ago, he died."

"And has my grandfather been alone ever since?"

"Yes. For some time he was too much grieved to trouble himself about the future—and then he was paralysed. Perhaps you have found out already that Hunsdon is a great deal more to him than so many acres of land and so much money? He loves it, and cares about it, more I believe than about any living creature."

"Yes; I can understand that the future of his estate is quite as important as the future of a son or daughter would be."

"Quite. He never could have borne the idea of its being joined to, or swallowed up by another. Therefore, I do not think, in any case, he would have left it to me. It was necessary he should have an heir, who would be really his successor, and I am very glad indeed that he found you."

Maurice did not quite understand the slight unconscious sadness of the tone in which Lady Dighton said, "in any case;" he did not even know that the one baby who had been for a little while heir of Dighton, and possible heir of Hunsdon, had died in her arms when the rejoicings for its birth were scarcely over. But he felt grateful to her for speaking to him so frankly, and his new position looked the more satisfactory now he knew that no shadow of wrong was done to any one by his occupying it.

Lady Dighton understood this perfectly well. She had a quick perception of the character and feelings of those she associated with; and had talked to Maurice intentionally of what she guessed he must wish to hear. She had a great deal more to say to him, still, about her grandfather and her husband, and the country; and wanted to ask questions innumerable about his former home in Canada, his mother, and everything she could think of, the discussion of which would make them better acquainted. For she had quite decided that, as she said, they were to be very good friends; and, to put all family interest and ties on one side, there was something not disagreeable in the idea of taking under her own peculiar tutelage a young and handsome man, who was quite new to the world, and about entering it with all the prestige which attends the heir of fifteen or twenty thousand a year.

They were still talking busily when Mr. Beresford's man came to say that his master was awake. They went in together and sat with him for the rest of the afternoon, until it was time for Lady Dighton to go. When she did, it was with a promise from Maurice, not to wait for a visit from Sir John, who was always busy, but to go over and dine at Dighton very soon; a promise Mr. Beresford confirmed, being in his heart very glad to see such friendly relations springing

up between his two grandchildren. Maurice, on his side, was equally glad, for not only did his new friendship promise pleasure to himself, but he had a secret satisfaction in thinking how well his cousin and Lucia would get on together if—

But then the recollection that he had left Cacouna in possession of Mr. Percy came to interrupt the very commencement of a day dream.



CHAPTER VII.

Maurice paid his visit to Dighton—paid two or three visits, indeed—and his cousin came to Hunsdon still oftener, so that in the course of a few weeks, a considerable degree of intimacy grew up between them. Sir John was, as his wife said, always busy; he was hospitable and friendly to his new connection, but in all family or social matters he was content, and more than content, to drop into the shade, and let Lady Dighton act for both; so that Maurice, like the rest of the world (always excepting his constituents and tenants), very soon began to consider him merely as an appendage, useful, certainly, but not of much importance to anybody.

In the progress of their acquaintance it was natural that the cousins should often speak of Canada. Lady Dighton understood as little, and cared as little, about the distant colony as English people generally do; but she had considerable curiosity as to Maurice's past life; and in her benevolent efforts to improve and polish him, she was obliged to recognize the fact that, loyal Englishman as he was by birth, education and association, he might have said truly enough,

"Avant tout, je suis Canadien."

She had no objection whatever to this; on the contrary, she had enough romance in her disposition to admire all generous and chivalric qualities, and her cousin's patriotism only made her like him the better; but in spite of his frankness in most things, she had no idea that this affection for his native country was linked to and deepened by another kind of love. Lucia's name had never passed his lips, and she had no means of guessing how daily and hourly thoughts of one fair young Canadian girl were inseparably joined to the very roots of every good quality he possessed. This ignorance did not at all arise from want of interest. Her feminine imagination, naturally fertile on such subjects, soon began to occupy itself with speculations in which every eligible young lady in the country figured in turn. It was not to be supposed that the heir of Hunsdon would find much difficulty in obtaining a wife; the really embarrassing task for his mentors was to see that he looked in the proper direction. And in this matter Mr. Beresford was not wholly to be trusted. So, as it happened, Lady Dighton began to take a great deal of perfectly useless thought and care for Maurice's benefit, at the very time when he, all unconscious of her schemes, was beginning to consider it possible that he

might confide to her the secret of his anxious and preoccupied thoughts.

It happened that Mr. Leigh, unaware of the deep interest his son took in the movements of Mr. Percy, only mentioned him in describing Bella Latour's wedding, and omitted to say a word about his leaving Cacouna. Thus it was not until three weeks after his arrival in England that a chance expression informed Maurice that his dangerous rival was gone away, without giving him the satisfaction of knowing that he had been dismissed and was not likely to return. The same mail which brought this half intelligence, brought also a letter from Mrs. Costello, which spoke of her own and Lucia's removal as a thing quite settled, though not immediate, and left the place of their destination altogether uncertain. These letters threw Maurice into a condition of discomfort and impatience, which he found hard to bear. He was extremely uneasy at the idea of his father being left without companion or nurse. This uneasiness formed, as it were, the background of his thoughts, while a variety of less reasonable, but more vivid, anxieties held a complete revel in the foreground. He had not even his old refuge against troublesome fancies; for work, real absorbing work, of any kind was out of the question now. His attendance on his grandfather, though often fatiguing enough, was no occupation for his masculine brain. If he had been a woman, he would have had a far better chance of imprisoning his mind as well as his body, in that sober, undisturbed, sick room; but though he could be almost as tender as a woman, he could not school himself into that strange kind of feminine patience, which even Lucia, spoiled child as she was, instinctively practised and grew strong in, while she tended his father.

He found himself perpetually losing the thread of some relation or dissertation which was intended for his benefit, and that of Hunsdon under his rule; he ran serious risk of displeasing Mr. Beresford, and finally he became so weary of thinking incessantly of one subject, but never speaking of it, that he made up his mind to take his cousin to some degree into his confidence. To some degree only—it could be a very small degree indeed, according to his ideas, for he could not tell her all, even of the little he knew, about the Costellos, and he had no intention of speaking much about Lucia, only mentioning her as an old playfellow of his sister's; quite forgetting that he would have either to change his own nature, or to dull Lady Dighton's ears and eyes, before he could talk of *her*, and not betray himself.

But a good opportunity for this confidence seemed hard to find, and whenever one did really occur Maurice let it slip, so that time passed on, and nothing was said; until at last, a new trouble came, so heavy and incomprehensible as entirely

to eclipse the former ones.

One morning, about six weeks after his arrival at Hunsdon, there arrived for Maurice two Canadian letters and a newspaper; the letters from his father and Mrs. Costello, the newspaper addressed by Harry Scott. Maurice dutifully opened Mr. Leigh's letter first; he meant just to see that all was well, and then to read the other; but the news upon which his eye fell, put everything else for the moment out of his head. He glanced half incredulously over what his father said, and then tore open the newspaper to seek for its confirmation. He had not far to seek. Two columns of the thin provincial sheet were scored with black crosses, and bore the ominous heading, "Dreadful Murder!" in the largest capitals. He read the whole terrible story through, and thought, as well as he could, over it, before he remembered the second and still unopened letter.

But no sooner had he opened and read this, than the news which had just before seemed to bring the most fearful realities of life and death so near to him, faded away almost out of his recollection to make way for the really personal interest of this calamity. Mrs. Costello wrote,

"I have done wrong; and I should feel more difficulty, perhaps, in asking you to forgive me, if I did not, with you, have to regret the bitter disappointment of my hopes and wishes. You and Lucia must not meet again, unless, or until, you can do so without any thought of each other except as old playfellows and friends. This sounds cruel, I know, and unreasonable,—all the more so after the confidence there has been between us lately; but you must believe me when I say that I have tried, more than I ought, to keep for myself the consolation of thinking that my darling would some day be safe in your care, and that this consolation has been torn from me. But what can I say to you? My dear boy, only less dear to me than Lucia, I know you will, you *must*, blame me, and yet it is for your sake and for that of my own honour that I separate you from us. You have a right that I should say more, hard as it is. My daughter, whom you have known almost all her innocent life, would, if you married her, bring, through those most nearly and inseparably connected with her, a stain and a blot upon your name; no honourable man can ever make her his wife, and the best prayer that can be made for her is, that she may remain as unconscious of all earthly love as she is now of yours. We are going away, not just yet, but very soon, to try to lose ourselves in the world; very possibly an explanation of much that I have not courage to tell you may soon become so public that even in England you may hear of it, and thank me for what I have written."

The letter broke off abruptly, but there was a postscript reminding him that no one, not even his father, knew more, or, indeed, as much as he did, of her secret, and bidding him not betray her; this postscript, however, remained at first unnoticed: there was enough in the letter itself to bewilder and stupefy its unfortunate reader. He went over it again and again, trying, trying to understand it; to make certain that there was not some strange mistake, some other meaning in it than that which first appeared. But no; it was distinct enough, though the writing was strangely unsteady, as if the writer's hand had trembled at the task. The task of doing what? Only of destroying a hope; and hope is not life, nor even youth, or strength, or sense, or capacity for work, and yet when Maurice rose from his solitary breakfast-table, and carried his letters away to his own room, although he looked and moved, and even spoke to a passing servant just as usual, he felt as if he had been suddenly paralysed, and struck down from vigorous life into the shadow of death. He sat in his room and tried to think, but no thoughts came; only a perpetual reiteration of the words, "You and Lucia must not meet again." Over and over, and over again, the same still incomprehensible sentence kept ringing in his ears. It was much the same thing as if some power had said to him, "You must put away from you, divorce, and utterly forget, all your past life; all your nature, as it has grown up, to this present time; and take a different individuality." The two things might equally well be said, for they were equally impossible. He laughed as this idea struck him. His senses were beginning to come back, and they told him plainly enough that any separation from Lucia, except by her own free choice and will, was as impossible as if they were already vowed to each other "till death us do part." There was so much comfort in this conviction that at last he was able to turn to the latter part of the letter, and to occupy himself with that mysterious yet terrible sentence, which said that Lucia, his purest and loveliest of women, whom all his long intimacy had not been able to bring down from the pedestal of honour and tender reverence on which his love had placed her, would bring a blot upon her husband's name.

In the first place, he simply and entirely refused to believe in the truth of the assertion; it was a fancy, an exaggeration at the least, and in itself, not a thing to be troubled at; but allowing that the idea could not have existed in her mother's mind without some foundation, what could that foundation be? To consider with the most anxious investigation everything he knew of the Costellos, their life, their characters, their history, brought him some comfort, but no enlightenment. He supposed, as all Cacouna did, that Mrs. Costello was the widow of a Spaniard, and that her husband had died when Lucia was an infant, but how to

make any of these scanty details bear upon the fact that now, lately, since he himself had left Cacouna, something had happened, either unforeseen, or only partly foreseen by Mrs. Costello, which brought disgrace and misery upon her and her child, he did not in the least understand. Personal disgrace, the shadow of actual ill-doing, resting upon either mother or daughter, was too utterly improbable a thought ever even to enter his mind; but what the trouble could be, or whence it came, he seemed to be less and less capable of imagining, the more he thought and puzzled over the matter. And the hint that by-and-by the mystery might be unravelled, not only to him, but to the whole world, was far from giving him comfort. Rather than have Lucia's name dragged out for vulgar comment, he would have been content to let her secret remain for ever undiscovered; and besides, this unwelcome revelation promised to come too late, when the Cottage was empty and its dearly loved occupants were gone far away out of his very knowledge.

Fortunately for Maurice, Mr. Beresford was later than usual in leaving his room that day, so that he had two hours in which to grow at least a little accustomed to his new perplexities before he had to attend his grandfather in the library. Even when he did so, however, he found it impossible to force his thoughts into any other channel, and his brain worked all day painfully and fruitlessly at schemes for finding out Mrs. Costello's secret, and demonstrating to her that far from its being a reason for depriving him of Lucia, it was an additional reason for giving her to him.



CHAPTER VIII.

Maurice tried to relieve his impatience by spending the very first half hour when he was not required to sit with his grandfather, in writing to Mrs. Costello. If the Atlantic telegraph had but been in operation she might have been startled by some vehement message coming in immediate protest against her decision; but as it was, the letter which could not, at the very best, reach her in much less than a fortnight, was full of fiery haste and eagerness. As for reason or argument, it made no attempt at either. It began with a simple unqualified declaration that what she had said was, as far as it regarded Maurice himself, of no value or effect whatever, that he remained in exactly the same mind as when he left Canada, and that nothing whatever would alter him, except Lucia's preference for some other person. He went on to say that he could still wait, but that as the strongest purpose of his life would be to give Lucia the choice of accepting or refusing him as soon as he had a home to offer her, it was needless unkindness to try to conceal her from him. Wherever she might be, he should certainly find her in the end, and he implored her mother to spare him the anxiety and delay of a search. Finally he wrote, "I cannot understand in the least what you can mean by the reason you give for casting me off, but you seem to have forgotten that if any disgrace (I hate to use the word), either real or imaginary, has fallen upon you, it is the more and not the less needful that you should have all the help and support I can give you. That may not be much, but such as it is I have a right to offer it, and you to accept it."

The letter wound up with the most urgent entreaties that she would answer it at once, and give up entirely the useless attempt to separate him from Lucia; and when it was finished and sent off, quite regardless of the fact that it would have left England just as soon if written two days later, he began to feel a little comforted, and as if he had at any rate put a stop to the worst evil that threatened him.

But the relief lasted only a few hours. By the next day he was tormenting himself with all the ingenuity of which he was capable, and the task of amusing Mr. Beresford was ten thousand times harder than ever. He did it, and did it better than usual, but only because he was so annoyed at his own anxiety and absence of mind that he set himself with a sort of dogged determination to conquer them, or at any rate keep them out of sight. The more, however, that he held his

thoughts shut up in his own mind, the more active and troublesome they became, and an idea took possession of him, which he made very few efforts to shake off, though he could not at first see clearly how to carry it into execution.

This idea was that he must return to Canada. He thought that one hour of actual presence would do more for his cause than a hundred letters—nay, he did not despair of persuading Mrs. Costello to bring Lucia to England, where he could keep some watch and guard over them both; but, at any rate, he had a strong fancy that he might at once learn the secret of her distress himself, and help her to keep it from others. He calculated that six weeks' absence from Hunsdon would enable him to do this, and at the same time to make arrangements for his father's comfort more satisfactory than the present ones. The last inducement was, of course, the one he meant to make bear the weight of his sudden anxiety, and after much deliberation, or what he thought was deliberation, he decided that the first thing to be done was to interest his cousin in his plans and try to get her help.

But as it happened, Lady Dighton was just at that moment away from home. She and Sir John were staying at a house which, though nearer to Hunsdon than to their own home, was a considerable distance for morning visitors, even in the country. Still Maurice, who had some acquaintance with the family, thought he might ride over and see her there, and take his chance of being able to get an opportunity of explaining the service he wanted her to do him. However, a slight increase of illness in Mr. Beresford prevented him from getting away from home, and he was obliged to wait with what patience he could for her next visit to Hunsdon.

Mr. Beresford's health appeared to return to its usual condition, and grateful for the comfort Maurice's presence had been to him during his greater suffering, he seemed to be every day more satisfied with and attached to his heir. The disadvantage of this was that he required more and more of Maurice's company, and seemed to dislike sparing him a moment except while he slept. This was not promising for the success of any scheme of absence, but, on the other hand, there was so much of reason and consideration for his grandson, mixed with the invalid's exactions, that it seemed not hopeless to try to obtain his consent.

After an interval of more than a week, Lady Dighton reappeared at Hunsdon, and Maurice's opportunity arrived. It was during their invariable *tête-à-tête* while Mr. Beresford slept that the wished-for conversation took place, and Lady Dighton unconsciously helped her cousin to begin it by telling him laughing that

she had been looking out for a wife for him, and found one that she thought would do exactly.

"You must contrive by some means or other," she said, "to get away from Hunsdon a little more than you have been doing, and come over to Dighton for a day or two, that I may introduce you."

"I wish with all my heart," he answered quickly, "that I could get away from Hunsdon for a little while, but I am afraid I should use my liberty to go much further than Dighton."

She looked at him with surprise.

"I did not know," she said, "that you had any friends in England except here."

"I have none. What I mean is that I want to go back to Canada for a week or two."

"To Canada! The other side of the world! What do you mean?"

"Nothing very unreasonable. I am very uneasy about my father, who is almost as great an invalid as my grandfather, and has no one but an old housekeeper to take care of him. I should like to go and bring him to England."

It was very well for Maurice to try to speak as coolly as possible, and even to succeed in making his voice sound perfectly innocent and natural, but he was of much too frank a nature to play off this little piece of dissimulation without a tell-tale change of countenance. Lady Dighton's sharp eyes saw quite plainly that there was something untold, but she took no notice of that for the present, and answered as if she saw nothing.

"Have you worse accounts of his health?"

"No; not worse. But he will be quite alone."

"More alone than when you first left him? I do not quite understand."

"Yes; some very near neighbours—old friends of his and my mother's—are going to leave Cacouna. I had no reason to be uneasy about him while they were there. Do you think my grandfather could be persuaded to spare me for six weeks?"

"Not willingly, I think. Could not my uncle come home without your going?"

Maurice felt as if he were caught in his own trap, but he recollected himself in a moment.

"There would be many things to do," he said. "Affairs to settle, the farm to sell or let, and the household, small as it is, to break up."

Lady Dighton laughed outright.

"And you imagine that you could do all that, and carry your father off besides, in the space of a fortnight, which is the very utmost you could possibly have out of your six weeks! Really, Maurice, I gave you credit for more reasonableness."

"I have no doubt I could do it," he said, a little vexed, "and of course I should try to get back as quickly as possible."

"Well, let me see if I cannot suggest something a little more practicable. Is there no person who would undertake the management of the mere business part of the arrangements?"

"Yes," Maurice answered a little reluctantly. "I dare say there is."

"As for the breaking up of the household, I should think my uncle would like to give the directions himself, and I do not see what more you could do; and for anything regarding his comfort, could not you trust to those old friends you spoke of?"

Maurice shook his head impatiently.

"They are going away—for anything I know, they may be gone now. No, Louisa, your schemes are very good, but they will not do. I must go myself; that is, if I can."

"And the fact of the matter is that you want me to help you to persuade grandpapa that he can spare you."

"Will you help me? I know it will be hard. I would not ask him if I were not half wild with anxiety."

Lady Dighton looked at her cousin's face, which was indeed full of excitement.

"What a good son you are, Maurice," she said slowly.

Maurice felt the blood rush to his very temples.

"I am a dreadful humbug," he said, feeling that the confession must come. "Don't be shocked, Louisa; it is not altogether about my father, but I tell you the truth when I say that I am half wild."

She smiled in a sort of satisfied, self-gratulatory way, and said, "Well," which was just what was needed, and brought out all that Maurice could tell about the Costellos. He said to himself afterwards that he had from the first been half disposed to confess the whole story, and only wanted to know how she was likely to take it; but the truth was that, being as utterly unskilful as man could be in anything like deception, he had placed himself in a dilemma from which she only meant to let him extricate himself by telling her what was really in his mind.

So Lady Dighton made her first acquaintance with Lucia, not, as Maurice had dreamed of her doing, in bodily presence, but through the golden mist of a lover's description; in the midst of which she tried to see a common-place rustic beauty, but could not quite succeed; and half against her will began to yield to the illusion (if illusion it was) which presented to her a queenly yet maidenly vision, a brilliant flower which might be worth transplanting from the woods even to the stately shelter of Hunsdon. It was clear enough that this girl, whatever she might be, had too firm a hold upon Maurice's heart to be easily displaced; and his cousin, not being altogether past the age of romance herself, gave up at once all her vague schemes of match-making in his service, and applied herself to the serious consideration how to obtain from her grandfather the desired leave of absence.

She did not, of course, understand all the story. The impression she derived from what Maurice told her was that Mrs. Costello, after having encouraged the intimacy and affection between her daughter and him up to the time of his great change of position and prospects, had now thought it more honourable to break off their intercourse, and carry her child away, lest he should feel bound to what was now an unequal connection. This idea of Lady Dighton's arose simply from a misconception of Maurice's evident reserve in certain parts of his confidence. *He* thought only of concealing all Mrs. Costello would wish concealed; and *she* dreamt of no other reason for the change of which he told her, than the very proper and reasonable one of the recent disparity of fortune.

Maurice was so delighted at finding a ready ally that the moment his cousin signified her willingness to help him, he began to fancy his difficulties were half removed, and had to be warned that only the first and least important step had

been taken.

"In the next place," Lady Dighton said, "we must consult Dr. Edwards."

"What for," asked Maurice in some perplexity.

"To know whether it would be safe to propose to my grandfather the loss of his heir."

"But for six weeks? It is really nothing."

"Nothing to you or me perhaps, but I am afraid it is a good deal to him, poor old man."

"Louisa, I assure you, I would not ask him to spare me for a day if it were not a thing that must be done now, and that I should all my life regret leaving undone."

She looked at him with an amused smile. People in love do so overrate trifles; but she was really of opinion that he should go if possible.

"Yes," she said, "I understand that. And I do not myself see any particular cause for delaying since it must be done. But still I think it would be well to ask the Doctor's opinion first."

"That is easy at any rate. He will be here to-morrow morning."

"And when do you wish to start?"

"By the first mail. I would not lose an hour if I could help it."

"You would frighten your father to death. No, you must wait a week certainly."

"I wish I were certain of being off in a week."

"Unreasonable boy! You talk of going across the Atlantic as other people do of going across the Channel. See, there is Brown, grandpapa must be awake."

They went into the library and found Mr. Beresford quite ready for an hour or two of cheerful chat about the thousand trifles with which his granddaughter always contrived to amuse him. Then she went away, turning as she drove off to give Maurice a last encouraging nod; and not long after, Mr. Beresford complained of being more drowsy than usual, and asked Maurice to read him to sleep.

A book, not too amusing, was found, and the reading began; but the reader's thoughts had wandered far from it and from Hunsdon, when they were suddenly recalled by a strange gurgling gasping sound. Alas! for Maurice's hopes. His grandfather lay struggling for the second time in the grasp of paralysis.

They carried him to his bed, dumb and more than half unconscious; and there day after day, and week after week, he lay between life and death; taking little notice of anybody, but growing so restlessly uneasy whenever Maurice was out of his sight, that all they thought of doing was contriving by every possible means to save him the one disquiet of which he still seemed capable.



CHAPTER IX.

The day after that on which Mr. Strafford paid his first visit to the jail at Cacouna, was the one fixed for Doctor Morton's funeral. Lucia knew that other friends would be with Bella, and was thankful to feel herself at liberty to stay at home—to be with her mother up to the moment of her going to that interview which Mr. Strafford advised, and to be on the spot at her return to hear without delay whatever its result might be.

In the afternoon, while the whole town was occupied with the ceremony which had so deep and painful an interest for everybody, Mrs. Costello and her faithful friend started for the jail. They said little to each other on the way, but as they drew near the end of their walk, Mrs. Costello began to talk about indifferent subjects by way of trying to lift for a moment the oppressive weight of thought which seemed almost to stupefy her. But the effort was to little purpose, and by the time they reached the door of the prison she was so excessively pale, and looked so faint and ill, that Mr. Strafford almost repented of his advice. It was too late now, however, to turn back, and all that could be done was to say, "Take courage; don't betray yourself by your face." The hint was enough, to one so accustomed to self-restraint; and when the jailer met them, she had forced herself to look much as usual.

But though she had sufficient command over herself to do this, and even to join, as much as was necessary, in the short conversation which took place before they were admitted to the prisoner's cell, she could not afterwards remember anything clearly until the moment when she followed Mr. Strafford through a heavy door, and found herself in the presence of her husband.

Then she seemed suddenly to wake, and the scene before her to flash at once and ineffaceably into her mind. It was a clean bare room, with a bed in one corner, and a chair and table in the middle; the stone walls, the floor and ceiling, all white, and a bright flood of sunshine coming in through the unshaded window. Sitting on the only chair, with his arms spread over the table, and his head resting on them, was the prisoner. His face was hidden, but the coarse, disordered dress, the long hair, half grey, half black, lying loose and shaggy over his bony hands, the dreary broken-down expression of his attitude, made a picture not to be looked upon without pity. Yet the thing that seemed most

pathetic of all was that utter change in the man which, even at the first glance, was so plainly evident. This visitor, standing silent and unnoticed by the door, had come in full of recollections, not even of him as she had seen him last, but of him as she had married him twenty years ago. Of *him*? It seemed almost incredible—yet for the very sake of the past and for the pitiful alteration now, she felt her heart yearn towards that desolate figure, and going softly forward she laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Christian!" she said in a low and trembling voice.

The prisoner slowly moved, as if waking from a doze. He raised his head, pushed back his tangled hair and looked at her.

What a face! It needed all her pity to help her to repress a shudder; but there was no recognition in the dull heavy eyes.

"Christian," she repeated. "See, I am your wife. I am Mary, who left Moose Island so many years ago."

Still he looked at her in the same dull way, scarcely seeming to see her.

"Mary," he repeated mechanically. "She went away." Then changing to his own language, he said with more energy, "She is hidden, but I shall find her; no fear," and his head sank down again upon his arm.

His wife trembled as she heard the old threat which had pursued her for so long, but she would not be discouraged. She spoke again in Ojibway,

"She is found. She wants to help and comfort her husband. She is here. Raise your head and look at her."

He obeyed, and looked steadily at her, but still with the look of one but half awake.

"No," he said slowly. "All lies. Mary is not like you. She has bright eyes, and brown hair, soft and smooth like a bird's wing. I beat her, and she ran away. Go! I want to sleep."

Mr. Strafford came forward.

"Have you forgotten me, too, Christian?" he asked.

Christian turned to him with something like recognition.

"No. You were here yesterday. Tell them to let me go away."

"It is because I want to persuade them to let you go, that I am here now, and your—this lady, whom you do not remember, also."

"What does a squaw know? Send her away."

A look passed between the two friends, and the wife moved to a little distance from her husband, where she was out of his sight.

"I wish," Mr. Strafford said, "you could tell me exactly what you were doing the day they brought you here."

"I was sleeping," Christian answered. "I lay under the bush, and went to sleep; and then they came and woke me, and brought me here. I want air!" he cried, suddenly changing his tone, and springing up, he rushed to the grated window, and seemed to gasp for breath. The small lattice stood open, but the prisoner, devoured by fever, could not be satisfied with such coolness as came in through it. He seized the iron bars with trembling hands and tried to shake them; then finding it useless, went back to his chair, and covering his face, burst into tears.

Mrs. Costello was instantly at his side. In her strange, short married life she had given no caresses to her tyrant; now, upon this miserable wreck, she lavished all the compassionate tenderness of her heart. Mr. Strafford stood by helpless, yielding to the woman her natural place of comforter. For a moment, as she held his head upon her bosom and laid her cool soft hand upon his burning forehead, Christian seemed to recognize her; he looked up into her face piteously, and once or twice repeated to himself, "Mary, Mary," but memory would not help him further. She soothed him, however, much as if he had been some wretched sick child, and after a time persuaded him to lie down on his bed, where, almost immediately, he fell asleep.

So they left him, and in going out, heard from the jailer that he often slept thus for hours together—rarely eating, and asking only for water and air.

One thing had been effected by their visit. From the moment when the prisoner, powerless henceforward to hurt or terrify her, was supported by his wife's arms, and soothed by her voice, she began to believe, completely and for ever, in his innocence of the crime of which he was accused, and to be ready to fight his battle with all her energy and all her resources. Only the recollection of Lucia prevented her from instantly avowing the relationship so long concealed; and in

the first warmth of a generous reaction, she almost regretted that she had not sent her child away, even to England, that she might now be free to devote herself to Christian. On their return to the Cottage they found Lucia watching with feverish anxiety for their coming and their news; but it was not until mother and daughter were shut up together in Mrs. Costello's room that all could be told. Nor even then; for the wife's heart had been too deeply touched; and not even her child could see into its troubled tender depths. But, nevertheless, Lucia caught from her mother the blessed certainty that, though man's justice might not clear the prisoner of murder, heaven's did; and they rejoiced together over this poor comfort, as if all the rest of their burden were easy to bear.

Afterwards a council was held as to what could be done for Christian's defence. All legal help possible must be obtained, they decided, at any risk; but to the two women this did not seem enough. One of them, at least, would have liked to try any scheme, however difficult or absurd, for fixing the guilt upon the true criminal, and so saving the false one; but so far from that, they must not even suffer their agitation and keen interest to be noticed; the very lawyers must be engaged with caution or bound to secrecy. As long as their secret *could* be kept, it must. And Mr. Strafford could not remain at Cacouna. He had come promptly to the help of the one unfortunate member of his flock, but the little community on the island always felt his absence grievously, and three or four days was the utmost he could spare at a time. Mrs. Costello greatly desired to see her husband again, but to do so without Mr. Strafford's presence was a trial from which she shrank, and which he thought there was not sufficient reason for her to undergo. It was decided therefore that he should make arrangements by which, and by the kindness of the jailer, she should be kept constantly informed of his condition of health, both mental and bodily. "If he should be either worse in body or better in mind," she said, "I shall go to him at once; and I have a strong presentiment that he will need me before long."

A separate consultation from which Lucia was excluded, ended in a decision to which she would certainly not have consented, however she might, later, be obliged to yield to it. This was, that if Mrs. Costello should feel herself called upon to avow her marriage for her husband's sake, Lucia should first be sent to England and confided to the care of her mother's cousin, George Wynter, so that she, at least, might be spared the hard task of facing her small familiar world under a new and degraded character. But of this plan Lucia suspected nothing. Her thoughts travelled as often as ever they had done, to that misty *terra incognita* which Canadians still call "Home," for now Maurice was there, and

perhaps (but for that thought she reproved herself) Percy also; but she had now wholly given up her dreams of visiting it, and most surely would not have resumed them with the prospect of leaving her mother in sorrow and alone.



CHAPTER X.

After a time of so much stress and excitement, there followed a pause—a period of waiting, both for the mother and daughter at the Cottage, and for the small world of Cacouna, which had been startled by the crime committed in its very midst. As for the Costellos, when all the little that they could do for the prisoner had been done, they had only to occupy themselves with their old routine, or as much of it as was still possible, and to try to bring their thoughts back to the familiar details of daily life. Household affairs must be attended to; Mr. Leigh must be visited, or coaxed out of his solitude to sit with them; other visits must be paid and received, and reasons must be found to account to their neighbours for the putting off of that journey which had excited so much surprise in anticipation. And so, as days went on, habit gradually came to their assistance, and by-and-by there were hours when they asked themselves whether all the commotion and turmoil of the last few weeks had been anything but a dream.

Beyond the Cottage, too, life had returned to its usual even flow. One household, it is true, was desolate; but that one had existed for so short a time that the change in it had scarcely any effect on the general current of daily affairs. Bella went away immediately after the funeral. Mrs. Bellairs had begun to despair of rousing her from her stupor of grief and horror, while she remained in the midst of all that could remind her of her husband; and, therefore, carried her away almost by force to the house of some relations near Toronto. When she came back, it would be to return to her old place in her brother-in-law's house, a pale, silent woman in widow's weeds, the very ghost of the gay bride who had left it so lately.

By Mrs. Morton's absence Lucia was relieved from her most painful task; for, although she now no longer felt herself the daughter of the murderer, there was so much disingenuousness in her position as the most loved and trusted friend of the woman who still regarded her father as the criminal, as to make it in the highest degree irksome to be with her. She now tried to occupy herself as much as possible at home; and while she did so, the calm to which she had forced herself outwardly began to sink into her heart, and she found, almost with surprise, that former habits of thought, and old likes and dislikes, had survived her mental earthquake, and still kept their places when the dust had settled, and the *debris* were cleared away. One old habit in particular would have returned as

strongly as ever, if circumstances had allowed—it was that of consulting and depending on Maurice in a thousand little daily affairs. Since the first two days of his absence there had been until now so constant a rush and strain of events and emotions, that she had not had time to miss him much; on the contrary, indeed, she had had passing sensations of gladness that he was not near at certain crises to pierce with his clear eyes and ready intuition, quite through the veil of composure which she could keep impervious enough to others. But now that the composure began to be more than a mere veil, and that her whole powers were no longer on the full stretch to maintain it; now, too, when everything outwardly went on the same as it had done three months ago, before Mr. Percy came to Cacouna, or the story of Christian had been told; now, she wanted the last and strongest of all old habits to be again practicable, and to see her old companion again at hand. She remained, however, totally unsuspecting of all that had passed between her mother and Maurice. She even fancied, sometimes, that Mrs. Costello did Maurice the injustice of believing him changed by the change of his circumstances, and that her affection for him had in consequence cooled.

"Of course," she said to herself, "if he were here now, and with us as he used to be, we should always have the feeling that by-and-by, when the truth comes to be known, or when we go away, we should have to part with him. But, still, it would be nice to have him. And I do not believe that, *at present*, he is changed towards us. Mr. Leigh thinks he wants to come back to Canada."

So she meditated more and more on the subject, because it was free from all agitating remembrances, and because Mrs. Costello was silent regarding it; and if poor Maurice, chafing with impatience and anxiety while he watched his helpless half-unconscious grandfather, could have had a peep into her mind, he would have consoled himself by seeing that little as she thought of the *kind* of affection he wanted from her, she was giving him a more and more liberal measure of such as she had.

A little while ago the same glimpse which would have consoled Maurice might have comforted Mrs. Costello; but since she had begun to regard Lucia as separated from him by duty and necessity, she rejoiced to think that he had never held any other place in her child's heart than that to which an old playfellow, teacher, and companion would under any circumstances have a right. Her own altered conviction as to Christian's guilt did not affect her feelings in this respect, for she knew that it was too utterly illogical to have any weight with others; and anticipating that even Maurice would be unable, were he told the whole story, to share in it, she felt that as regarded him, guilt or unproved innocence would be

precisely the same thing; and that, however his generosity might conceal the fact, Lucia would always remain in his belief the daughter of a murderer. To suffer her child to marry him under these circumstances was not to be thought of, even if Lucia herself would consent; so, in spite of the half-frantic letters which Maurice found time to despatch by every mail, and in which he used over and over again every argument he could think of to convince her that whatever her difficulties might be, she had no right to refuse what she had once tacitly promised, she resolutely gave up, and put away from her, the hopes she had long entertained, and the plans which had been the comfort of her heart.

It was settled, without anything definite being said on the subject, that they were to remain at the Cottage until the Assizes, or just before; so that Christian, in any need, might have help at hand. When his trial was over, their future course would be decided,—or, rather, Mrs. Costello's would, for it depended on the sentence. If that should be "Not guilty," she would claim the unhappy prisoner at once, and take him to some strange place where she could devote herself to caring for him in that helplessness which renewed all his claims upon her. If it were "Guilty," she would go immediately to the seat of Government and never cease her efforts till she obtained his pardon. She felt no fear whatever of succeeding in this—his wretchedness and imbecility would be unanswerable arguments—no one would refuse to her the miserable remnant of such a life.

Lucia heard, and shared in arranging all these plans. She was still ignorant that they were not intended to include herself, and Mrs. Costello shrank from embittering the last months of their companionship by the anticipations of parting. Thus they continued to live in the tranquil semblance of their former happiness, while winter settled in round them, and the time which must inevitably break up the calm drew nearer and nearer.

Mrs. Bellairs and her sister came back from their visit. Bella was still silent and pale—still had the look of a person whom some sudden shock has benumbed,—but she no longer shut herself up; and as much as their deep mourning would allow, the household returned to their former hospitable, cheerful ways. Mrs. Bellairs again came frequently to the Cottage. She saw now, after her absence, a far greater change than she had before realized, in both mother and daughter; and thinking that variety and cheerful society were the best remedies, if not for both, certainly for Lucia, she did all she could to drag the poor girl out, and to force her into the company of those she most longed, but did not dare, to avoid. There was one comfort; wherever Bella was, no allusion to the murder could be made; but wherever she was not, Lucia constantly heard such sayings as these:—

"Yes, it has been mentioned in the *Times* even, such a peculiarly horrid thing, you know, poor man." "Just like a savage. Oh! it's all very well to talk of Indians being civilized, but I am quite convinced they never are, really. And then, you see, the real nature breaks out when they are provoked."

Some more reasonable person would suggest, "But they say that at Moose Island Mr. Strafford has done wonders;" and he answered,

"Ah! 'they say.' It is so easy to say anything. Why, this very man, or brute, comes from Moose Island!"

"Does he? But, of course, there must be some bad. Let us ask Miss Costello. She knows Mr. Strafford."

And Lucia would have to command her face and her voice, and say, "I only know by report. I believe Mr. Strafford's people are all more or less civilized."

Sometimes she would hear this crime used as an argument in favour of driving the Indians further back, and depriving them of their best lands, for the benefit of that white race which had generously left them here and there a mile or two of their native soil; sometimes as a proof that to care for or instruct them, was waste of time and money; sometimes only as a text whereon to hang a dozen silly speeches, which stung none the less for their silliness; and it was but a poor compensation for all she thus suffered when some one would speak out heartily and with knowledge, in defence of her father's people.

She said not a word to her mother of these small but bitter annoyances; only found herself longing sometimes for the time when, at whatever cost, her secret might be known, and she be free. In the meantime, however, Mrs. Bellairs guessed nothing of the result of her kindness; for Lucia, feeling how short a time might separate her for ever from this dear friend, was more affectionate than usual in her manner, and had sometimes a wistful look in her beautiful eyes, which might mean sorrow, either past or future, but had no shadow of irritation.

Mr. Strafford came up to Cacouna twice during Christian's imprisonment. The first time he found no particular change. A low fever still seemed to hang about the prisoner, and his passionate longing for the free air to be his strongest feeling. There was no improvement mentally. His brain, once cultivated and active, far beyond the standard of his race, seemed quite dead; it was impossible to make him understand either the past or future, his crime (if he were guilty), or his probable punishment. In spite of the feeling against him, there were

charitable men in Cacouna who would gladly have done what they could to befriend him, but literally nothing could be done. Mr. Strafford left him, without anything new to tell the anxious women at the Cottage.

But the second time there was an evident alteration in the physical condition of the prisoner. He scarcely ever moved from his bed; and when he was with difficulty persuaded to do so, he tottered like a very old and feeble man. Even to breathe the air which he still perpetually asked for, he would hardly walk to the window; and there were such signs of exhaustion and utter weakness, that it seemed very doubtful whether, before the time of the Assizes, he would not be beyond the reach of human justice. Mr. Strafford went back to the Cottage with a new page in her sorrowful life to tell to Mrs. Costello. To say that she heard with great grief of the probable nearness of that widowhood which, for years past, would have been a welcome release, would be to say an absurdity; but, nevertheless, it is true that a deep and tender feeling of pity, which was, indeed, akin to love, seemed to sweep over and obliterate all the bitterness which belonged to her thoughts of her husband. She wished at once to avow their relationship; and it was only Mr. Strafford's decided opinion that to do so would be hurtful to Lucia and useless to Christian, which withheld her. Clearly the one thing which he, unused to any restraint, needed and longed for, was liberty; and even that, if it were attainable, he seemed already too weak to enjoy. His ideas and powers of recollection were growing still weaker with every week of imprisonment, but nothing could be done—nothing but wait, with dreary patience, for the time of the trial.

CHAPTER XI.

The time of the Assizes drew near, and Mrs. Costello looked forward to it with feelings of mixed, but almost wholly painful, anticipation. She was now in daily expectation of receiving a letter from her cousin, which should authorize her to send Lucia at once to England, and she had not yet dared to speak on the subject. She thought, with reluctance, of sending her child to the neighbourhood of Chester, where her own youth and unfortunate marriage might still be remembered, or, if almost forgotten, would be readily called to mind by the singular beauty of the half-Indian girl; and she doubted how far the only other arrangement which suggested itself to her, that of placing her daughter at school, might be practicable. She had, also, to add to her other perplexities, a lurking conviction that, whenever Lucia did become aware of the plans that had been made for her, those plans stood no small chance of being entirely swept away; or, if carried out at all, that they would be finally shaped and modified according to Lucia's own judgment and affection for herself, of which two qualities she had for a long time been having daily stronger proofs. But in whatever way she regarded the future, it was full of difficulties and darkness; and she had no longer either strength or courage to face these hopefully. The fainting fits which had twice alarmed Lucia, and which she spoke of as trifling and temporary indispositions, she herself knew perfectly well to be only one of the symptoms of a firmly-rooted and increasing disease. She had taken pains to satisfy herself of the truth; she knew that she might live for years; and that, under ordinary circumstances, there was very little fear of the immediate approach of death; but she knew, also, that every hour of agitation or excitement hastened its steps; and how could she hope to avoid either? The very effort to decide whether she ought to part with her child, or to suffer her to remain and face the impending revelations, was in itself an excitement in which life wasted fast.

But in this, as in so many human affairs, forethought was useless; and the course of events, over which so many weary hours of calculation had been spent, was already tending in a direction wholly unthought of and unexpected. The first indication of this was the increasing illness of Christian.

When Mr. Strafford returned to Moose Island, after his second stay at Cacouna, he had begged Elton, the kind-hearted jailer, to send word to Mrs. Costello if any decided change took place in the prisoner before his return; and as she was

known to be his friend and correspondent, this attracted no remark, and was readily promised. A little more than a fortnight before the expected trial, Elton himself came one day to the Cottage, and asked for Mrs. Costello. She received him with an alarm difficult to conceal, and, guessing his errand, asked at once if he had a worse account of his prisoner to send to Mr. Strafford?

"Well, ma'am," he answered, "I don't know whether to call it a worse account or not, considering all things; but he is certainly very ill, poor creature."

"What is it? Anything new, or only an increase of weakness?"

"Just that, ma'am. Always a fever, and every day less strength to stand against it. The doctor says he can't last long in the way he's going on."

"And can *nothing* be done?"

"Well, you see, he can't take food; and more air than he has we can't give him. It is hard on those that have spent most of their lives out of doors to be shut up anywhere, and naturally he feels stifled."

"Do you say he takes no food?"

"Next to none. It is not to say that he can't take the regular meals, but we have tried everything we could think of, and it is all much the same."

"I should like to see him again. Can I do so?"

"Oh yes, ma'am. There need be no difficulty about that; but he knows nobody."

Elton got up to leave.

"I will write to Mr. Strafford," Mrs. Costello said, "and meantime I will come myself to-morrow, if you can admit me then."

"Certainly, ma'am, and I am much obliged to you."

Mrs. Costello sank back into her chair when he was gone, and covered her face with her hands. Disease and death then would not wait for that trial, to which she had looked as the inevitable first step towards the prisoner's release. He was about perhaps to be emancipated in a speedier way than by man's justice. But if so, would not he be always supposed guilty? Would not the blot upon her and her child be ineffaceable? Whether or not, he must not die alone, untended by those who were nearest to him, and dependent on the charity and kindness of

strangers. She called Lucia, and told her what she had just heard.

"I shall write to Mr. Strafford," she said, "and if there seems no special reason for doing otherwise, I will wait for his coming before I make any change; but if he cannot come just now, or if I should find it needful for—for your father's sake, Lucia, our secret must be told at once."

At that word "your father" a sudden flush had risen to the cheeks of both mother and child. They had both been learning lately to *think* of the father and husband by his rightful titles, but this was perhaps the first time he had been so spoken of; each felt it as the first step towards his full recognition.

Lucia was silent for a moment, and Mrs. Costello asked, "Do you think that is being too hasty?"

"Oh! *no*, mamma. I think it should be done at once. But you will let me go with you?"

"Not to-morrow, darling; perhaps afterwards."

"Mamma, I ought to go."

Mrs. Costello in her turn was silent, thinking whether this new emergency ought not to hasten the execution of her plans for Lucia. Finally, she decided that it ought; but it was with some trepidation that she began the subject.

"I see plainly enough," she said, with an effort to smile, "that I ought to go, and that my strongest duty at present will be at the jail, but I am not so sure about you."

"But you do not suppose that I shall let you wear yourself out while I stay at home doing nothing?"

"I wish you to go away for a time."

"Me! Away from you?"

"Would it be so hard?"

"Impossible. I would not leave you for anything."

"Not even to obey me, Lucia?"

"Mamma, *what* do you mean?"

"I wish you to go for a little while to England, where you have so often wished to go."

"And in the meantime what are you going to do?"

"At present you see how I shall be occupied. When the trial is over, I hope to bring your father here and nurse him as long as he requires nursing."

"And then?"

"Then we will be together somewhere; I do not yet know where."

"And where am I to go in England?"

"My cousin will take care of you for me. Remember, it is only for a little while."

"Have you been plotting against me long, mother?"

"My child, I have been obliged to think of your future."

"And you thought that I was a baby still—only an encumbrance, to be sent away from you when you had other troubles to think of?"

"My best comforter, rather."

"Well then, mother, I have my plan, which is better than yours, and more practicable, too."

"Mine is perfectly practicable; I have thought well of it."

"It is impracticable; because I am not going to England, or indeed to leave you at all."

"But, Lucia, I have written to my cousin."

"I am very sorry, mamma, but I cannot help it. Indeed, I do not want to be disobedient, or to vex you, but you must see that if I *did* go it would only make us both wretched, and besides, it would not be *right*."

Mrs. Costello sighed.

"How not right?"

"I think, mother, that when people know who we are—I mean when my father comes here—there will be a great deal of speculation and gossip about us all,

and people will watch us very closely, and that it would be better if when you bring him home, everything should be as if he had never been away from us. Do you know what I mean?"

"I suppose I do," Mrs. Costello answered slowly. "You mean that when we take him back, we should not seem to be ashamed of him?"

Lucia hid her face against her mother's dress.

"Oh! mamma, is it wrong to talk so? He is my father after all, and it seems so dreadful; but indeed I shall try to behave like a daughter to him."

Yet even as she spoke, an irrepressible shudder crept over her with the sudden recollection of the only time she had seen the prodigal.

"My poor child!" and her mother's arm was passed tenderly round her, "it is just that I wish to spare you."

Lucia looked up steadily.

"But ought I to be spared, mother? It seems to me that my duty is just as plain as yours. Do not ask me to go away."

"I am half distracted, darling, between trying to think for you and for him. And perhaps all my thought for him may be useless."

"At least, think only of him for the present."

"If he should die before the trial?"

"If he could only be cleared! Perhaps it would save him yet."

"Yes. It seems to be imprisonment which is killing him; but nothing less than a miracle could make any change now, and there are no miracles in our days."

"Ah! mamma, has not a miracle been worked already?"

"How?"

"Only a little while ago remember how we thought and spoke of him—and now —"

"You are right, my child; but the agencies which have worked this miracle are very earthly ones—pain and sorrow, and false accusation."

"Mamma, I think this is better than the old life of terror, and perhaps hatred."

"Far better, far better. Yes, through dark and painful means a better end is coming. But it is hard to think that you must live through all your life under the shadow of a supposed crime. For us who have sinned life is nearly over, our punishment was just, and it will soon be ended. It is you, my child, whom I have so tried to shield, who must bear the heaviest penalty."

"No, mother, do not think so. When all this is over we shall go away, you and I, and be very happy together again; and the happiness will be more equally balanced than it was in the old days when you had so much care and I none. And then, if ever I am left alone, I shall go and be a Sister of Charity or one of Miss Nightingale's nurses, and be too busy and useful to be unhappy."

Mrs. Costello stooped down and kissed her child's forehead.

"I thought you might have had a brighter fate than that, darling. Perhaps I thought more of seeing you a happy woman than a good one; but if you are never to have the home I wished for you, you will find, at any rate, that a single woman's life may be full of usefulness and honour."

Ah! that brighter fate! Mrs. Costello thought of Maurice, and sighed for the loss to two lives. Lucia's heart still turned loyally to the one lover who had claimed it, but both knew that the "brighter fate" was no longer a possibility now.



CHAPTER XII.

Lucia walked with her mother to the gates of the jail, but she could not obtain permission to go any further. Although the proposal to send her to England was, in fact, abandoned, there seemed no reason why she should be brought sooner than was needful into contact with what could not but be painful; and she was obliged to yield in this matter to her mother's judgment.

They parted, therefore, at the gates; and Mrs. Costello was admitted without delay to the cell where Christian was confined. A cell, properly speaking, it was not; for they had removed him since her former visit, and he now occupied a good-sized room on the upper floor, which was nearly as bare and as glaringly white as the other, but more airy. His low wooden bedstead was drawn near to the window, which, cold as it was, stood open, while a small box-stove, heated almost red hot, kept the temperature of the room tolerably high. On the bed, partly dressed, and wrapped in a blanket, lay the prisoner. He neither moved nor paid any attention when his visitor came in, and she had time to see all the change confinement and illness had made in him. And the change was, indeed, startling. All the flush of intemperance had left his face, and at this moment his fever had subsided also, and left him only the natural dark but clear tint of his Indian blood; his hair had been smoothly combed, and looked less grey than when it hung tangled and knotted; his extreme weakness gave him an aspect of repose, which brought back the ghost of his old self—something of the look of that Christian who had been, to a girl's fancy, so fit a hero of romance.

It was but a likeness, truly, shadowy and dim, but it seemed to bridge over the interval—the long, long weary years since the hero changed into the tyrant, and to make far easier that task of comforting and helping which duty, and not love, had imposed.

She came to his side, and still he did not notice her. His eyes were fixed on the pale, grey, snowy sky, and he seemed deaf to the slight sounds of her movements. She sat down and watched him silently. From the first moment she knew that all, and more than all, Elton had said was true. She saw death unmistakable, inevitable, and close at hand, and reproached herself for not having come sooner. But in that strange calm and stillness, even self-reproach seemed to be curbed and repressed—even a quickened beating of the heart

would have been out of place. So they remained until fully half an hour had passed, when the door of the room again opened; this time to admit the doctor.

He was an elderly man, kind, busy, and quick in his words and motions. He came in briskly, and looked rather surprised at seeing Mrs. Costello. She only bowed, however, and drew back as he came towards the bedside. He was followed into the room by the jailer's wife, who had compassionately tended the prisoner ever since his illness increased.

Christian seemed to wake from his stupor, or dream, at the sound of the doctor's voice. He answered the questions put to him mechanically but clearly, and with his old purity of accent and expression. The dialogue, however, even with Mrs. Elton's comments, was but a short one, and as soon as it was ended, Mrs. Costello came forward and stopped the doctor on his way from the room.

"Will you tell me," she said in a low voice, "exactly what you think of him?"

He looked at her again with some surprise.

"I am interested in the question," she went on, regulating her voice with a painful effort. "I assure you it is not from mere curiosity I ask."

"He is very low, very low indeed; but allow me to say, this is not the place for you."

"I will not do myself any harm," she answered, with a faint smile; "you shall not have any occasion to scold me."

"How long have you been here?"

"About half an hour. And you may feel my pulse if you like; it is perfectly steady."

She held out her wrist; the pulse was, in fact, quite regular, rather more so than usual, and there was nothing to show that the sick room was "not the place for her."

"Now tell me," she said; "he is dying, is not he?"

"Yes. Best thing that can happen to him, poor wretch."

"You don't think he will live to be tried?"

He shook his head.

"More than doubtful."

"But it is only a fortnight, and there seems to be no acute disease."

"He would have a better chance of living if there were. He is completely worn out—dying of exhaustion. It is a question if he lasts another week."

"Tell me, please, exactly what can be done for him."

"Very little indeed. And Mrs. Elton is a good nurse."

The same look of inquiry as before was in the doctor's face while he gave this answer, and Mrs. Costello felt that some explanation was necessary.

"I have no doubt she is. But I knew him—knew something of him—many years ago," she said; "and Mr. Strafford, the clergyman at Moose Island, you know, confided him to my care."

She spoke hurriedly, but without faltering, and the doctor was satisfied. He told her briefly all that could be done for his patient, and then went away, with a last warning not to stay too long.

This short conversation had been carried on rapidly and in very low tones. Mrs. Elton had left the room, and Christian seemed quite unconscious of the presence of the speakers. When the doctor was gone, his wife again came to his bedside, and seeing that he had not yet sunk back quite into his former lethargic state, she laid her hand gently on his without speaking.

He did not move, but merely raised his languid eyes to her face. Something there, however, seemed to fix them, and he lay looking at her with a steady intent gaze, as if trying to recognise her.

"Christian," she said very softly, with a trembling voice, "do you remember me?"

"I remember," he answered in a half whisper, "not you, but something like you."

"I am changed since then," she went on; "we are both changed, but we shall be together again now."

He was still watching her, and there seemed to be a clearer consciousness in his gaze.

"Are you Mary?" he asked after a moment.

"I am Mary, your wife," she answered.

"There was something else," he went on, slowly groping as it were for broken memories of the past. "There was another."

"Our child?" she asked, "Do you remember her?"

"Yes; is she here?"

"No. Would you like to see her?"

"No matter. I lost you. Where have you been?"

"Near here. Forget that; now I shall not leave you again for long."

"I am tired; I think I shall sleep."

And the light began to fade out of his eyes, and the same kind of dull insensibility, not sleep, crept over him again.

She left him at last in much the same state as she found him; and after a long talk with Mrs. Elton, who was at first a little inclined to be jealous of interference, but came round completely after a while, she left the jail and started for home.

It was a dreary walk, through the snowy roads and under the leaden-coloured sky. She had to pass through a part of the town which lay close to the river, where the principal shops and warehouses stood. Passing one of the shops, or as they were generally called, "stores," she remembered some purchases she wanted to make, and went in. While she was occupied with her business, some loud voices at the further end of the store attracted her attention, and she was aware of a group of men sitting upon barrels and boxes, and keeping up a noisy conversation, mixed with frequent bursts of laughter.

The store was not one of the best class even for Cacouna, but Mrs. Costello had gone into it because it had a kind of "specialité," for the articles she required. It was most frequented by rough backwoodsmen and farmers, and to that class the noisy party seemed to belong. Some little time was necessary to find from a back shop one of the things Mrs. Costello asked for, and while she waited she could not help but hear what these men were saying. A good many oaths garnished their speeches, which, deprived of them, were much as follows:

"You did not go into mourning, anyhow?"

"Not I. Saved me a deal of trouble, *he* did."

"You'll be turned out all the same, yet, I guess."

"They have not turned me out yet. And if Bellairs tries that trick again, I'll send my old woman and the baby to Mrs. Morton. That'll fix it."

There was a roar of laughter. Then,

"They are sure to hang him, I suppose?"

"First hanging ever's been at Cacouna if they do."

"I guess you'll be going to see him hung, eh, Clarkson?"

"I reckon so; but it's time I was off."

One of the speakers, a thickset, heavy-browed man, came down the store, stared rudely at Mrs. Costello as he passed, and going out, got into a waggon that stood outside, and drove away.

At the same moment the shopman came back and wondered at his customer's trembling hand as he showed her what he had brought. She scarcely understood what he said. She had turned cold as ice, and was saying over and over to herself, "The murderer, the murderer." She hurried to finish her business and get out into the open air, for in the store she felt stifled. She had never before seen, to her knowledge, this Clarkson, whom she accused in her heart; and now his evil countenance, his harsh voice and brutal laugh had thrown her into a sudden terror and tumult. As she walked quickly along, she remembered a story she had heard of him, when and how she scarcely knew, but the story itself came back to her mind with singular distinctness.

A poor boy, an orphan, had been engaged by Clarkson as a servant. Much of the hard rough work about the kind of bush farm established by the squatter, fell to his share; he was not ill fed, for Mrs. Clarkson saw to that, but his promised wages never were paid. The lad complained to his few acquaintance that nearly the whole sum due to him for two years' service was still in his master's hands, and though he dared not let Clarkson know that he had complained, he took courage, by their advice, to threaten him with the law. One day soon after this, Clarkson and his servant were both engaged loading a kind of raft, or flat boat, with various produce for market. A dispute arose between them, the boy fell or was pushed overboard, and though the creek was quite shallow, and he was

known to be able to swim, he was never seen from that time.

This was the story which had been whispered about until Mrs. Costello heard it, and which now returned to her mind with horrible force. A murderer, a double, a treble murderer—(for was not Christian dying from the consequences of *his* guilt?); she felt at that moment no resignation, but a fierce desire to push aside all the cruel, complete, *false* evidence, and force justice to recognize the true criminal.

"Coward that I am!" she cried in her heart. "But I will at least do what I can. To-morrow I will let the truth about myself be known, and try whether that cannot be made to help me to the other truth. To-morrow, to-morrow!"

She reached home exhausted, yet sustained by a new energy, and told Lucia her story and her determination. To her, young and impatient of the constant repression and concealment, this resolve was a welcome relief; and they talked of it, and of the future together until they half persuaded themselves that to restore to Christian his wife and daughter would be but the beginning of a change which should restore him both life and liberty.



CHAPTER XIII.

The arrival of letters at the Cottage was somewhat irregular and uncertain. Mails from England and the States reached Cacouna in the evening, and if a messenger was sent to the post-office the letters could be had about an hour afterwards. Since Maurice had been in England, the English mails were eagerly looked for, and Mr. Leigh never failed to send at the very first moment when it was possible there might be news of him. Lately Maurice's correspondence had been nearly equally divided between his father and Mrs. Costello; and Mr. Leigh had wondered not a little at the fretted impatient humour which showed itself plainly at times in his share of the letters written in that silent and shadowy sickroom at Hunsdon. But Maurice said nothing to him of the real cause of his discontent—very little of his plan of returning to Cacouna; and it was Mrs. Costello who received the notes which acted as safety valves to his almost irrepressible disturbance of mind. He continued to send her, once a week, a sheet full of persuasions and arguments which the moment they were written seemed unanswerable, and the moment they were despatched appeared puerile and worthless. Still they came, with no other effect than that of making the recipient more and more unhappy, as she perceived how her own mistake had helped to increase Maurice's hopes, and to darken his life by their destruction.

One of these letters arrived on the very evening of Mrs. Costello's visit to the jail. It was shorter and more hurried than usual, and spoke of Mr. Beresford being worse—so much worse that his granddaughter had been sent for hastily, and, as every one supposed, for the last time; but it was just as peremptory as any former one, in declaring that nothing could or should prevent the writer from seeking for, and finding Lucia wherever she might be, the moment he was free to leave England.

Mrs. Costello read this note with some uneasiness. She saw that on the question which of two declining lives should waste fastest, much of the future now depended. If death came first to the rich and well-born Englishman, in his stately house, Maurice would be set at liberty, and by his presence at Cacouna would add to her difficulties; if, to the miserable prisoner who had been for so many years her terror and disgrace, and was now thrown upon her care and pity, she should yet be able to fly with Lucia and hide herself, not now indeed from an enemy, but from too faithful a friend.

In the meantime, however, since she had decided to make her marriage known to all the little world of Cacouna, she began to feel that the Leighs, both father and son, had a right to have the truth simply and immediately from herself. She said nothing to Lucia that evening on this subject, but after going to her room for the night, she sat down and wrote a very brief but clear explanation of her secret, for Maurice; adding only a few words of affectionate farewell, and an intimation that it was better for all direct communication between them to cease with this letter.

Next morning at breakfast she told Lucia what she had done, saying simply that she preferred writing to Maurice, to leaving him to find out the truth by more indirect means; and added that she intended going at once to Mr. Leigh's and making him her first confidant in Cacouna. Lucia could only assent. *Somebody* must be the first to hear the story, and who so fit as their old and dear friend?

"If Maurice were but here!" she said, with a sigh, "he would be such a comfort, I know, for nothing would make any change in him."

Mrs. Costello echoed the sigh, but not the wish.

"If he will but stay away!" she thought, and said nothing.

She put on her bonnet as soon as breakfast was over, and walked slowly up the lane to the farmhouse. Lucia watched her anxiously, and many times during the next two hours went to the windows to see if she were returning, but it was after twelve before she came, and then she looked pale and exhausted from the morning's excitement.

She lay down, however, at Lucia's entreaty, and by-and-by began to tell her what had passed.

In the first place Mr. Leigh had been utterly astonished. Through all the years of their acquaintance the secret had been so well kept that he had never had the smallest suspicion of it. Like all the rest of her neighbours he had supposed Mrs. Costello a widow, whose married life had been too unhappy for her to care to speak of it. The idea that this dead husband was a Spaniard had arisen in the first place from Lucia's dark complexion and black hair and eyes, as well as from the name her mother had assumed; it had been, in fact, simply a fancy of the Cacouna people, and no part of Mrs. Costello's original plan of concealment. It had come, however, to be as firmly believed as if it had been ever so strongly asserted, and had no doubt helped to save much questioning and many remarks.

All these ideas, firmly rooted in Mr. Leigh's mind, had taken some little time to weed out; but when he heard and understood the truth, it never occurred to him to question for a moment the wisdom or propriety of her flight from her husband or of the means she had taken to remain safe from him. He thought the part of a friend was to sympathize and help, not to criticize, and after a few minutes' consideration as to how help could best be offered, he asked whether she intended that very day to claim her rightful post as Christian's nurse.

"I did intend to do so," she answered, "but for two or three reasons I think I had perhaps better wait until to-morrow. Mr. Strafford may possibly be here then."

"You will be glad to have him with you," Mr. Leigh answered, "but it seems to me that an old neighbour who has seen you every day for years, might not be out of place there too. Will you let me go with you to the jail?"

"Dear Mr. Leigh! you cannot. You have not been out of the house for weeks."

"All laziness. Though indeed I could not pretend to walk so far. But we can have Lane's covered sleigh, and go without any trouble."

Mrs. Costello still protested; but in her heart she was perfectly well aware that Mr. Leigh's presence would be a support to her in the first painful moments when she must acknowledge herself the wife of a supposed murderer—and more than that, of an Indian, who had become in the imagination of Cacouna, the type and ideal of a savage criminal. So, finally, it was arranged that she should be accompanied to the prison on the following day by her two faithful friends (supposing Mr. Strafford to have then arrived), and that in the meantime she should merely pay her husband a visit without betraying any deeper interest in him than she had shown already.

Mr. Leigh asked whether he should tell Maurice what he had himself just heard, and in reply Mrs. Costello gave him the note she had written, and asked him to enclose it for her.

"I thought it was better and kinder to write to him myself," she said. "It will be a shock to Maurice to know the real position of his old playfellow."

Mr. Leigh looked at her doubtfully.

"It will be a surprise, no doubt," he said, "as it was to me, and he will be heartily sorry not to be here now to show you both how little change such a discovery makes. But do you know, Mrs. Costello, it has struck me lately that there was

something wrong either with you and Maurice, or with Lucia and Maurice?"

"There is nothing wrong with either, I assure you. You know yourself," she answered with a smile, "that Maurice never forgets to send us a note by every mail."

"That is true; but it does not altogether convince me; Maurice is worried and unhappy about something, and yet I cannot make out that there is anything in England to trouble him."

"On the contrary," Mrs. Costello said, as she rose, "except for Mr. Beresford's illness I think he has everything he can reasonably wish for—and more."

She held out her hand to say good-bye, feeling a strong desire to get away, and escape from a conversation which was becoming embarrassing. Mr. Leigh took it and for one second held it, as if he wished to say something more, but the feeling that he had really no ground but his own surmises for judging of Maurice's relations with either Lucia or her mother, checked him.

Mrs. Costello hurried home. She knew as well as if he had said so, that her old friend guessed his son's attachment and was ready to sanction it; she could easily understand the generous impulse which would have urged him to offer to her and her child all the support and comfort which an engagement between the two young people could be made to afford; but she would not even trust herself to consider for a moment the possibility of accepting a consolation which would cost the giver so dear. Maurice, she felt, ought to marry an English-woman, his mother's equal; and no doubt if he and Lucia could be kept completely apart for two or three years, he would do so without reluctance; only nothing must be said about the matter either by Mr. Leigh or to Lucia. As for her daughter, the very circumstance which had formerly seemed most unfavourable to her wishes was now her great comfort; she rejoiced in the certainty that Lucia had never suspected the true nature or degree of Maurice's regard. It was in this respect not to be much regretted that Lucia still thought faithfully of Percy—not at all as of one who might yet have any renewed connection with her life, but as of one dead. The poor child, in spite of her premature womanliness, was full of romantic fancies; while Percy was near her she had made him a hero; now since his disappearance, she had found it natural enough to build him a temple and put in it the statue of a god. And it was better that she should mourn over a dead love, than that she should a second time be tormented by useless hopes and fears.

That afternoon Mrs. Costello and Lucia went together into Cacouna, taking with

them some small comforts for the invalid, but Lucia was not yet permitted to see him. She parted from her mother at the prison door, and went to pay a visit to Mrs. Bellairs and Bella, the last time she was ever likely to see them on the old frank and intimate footing. Even now, indeed, the intimacy had lost much of its charm. She loved them both more than ever, but the miserable consciousness of imposture weighed heavily upon her, and seemed to herself to colour every word she uttered. She did not stay long; and making a circuit in order to pass the jail again, in hopes of meeting her mother, she walked sadly and thoughtfully through the winter twilight towards home. In passing through the town she noticed an unusual stir of people; groups of men stood in the streets or round the shop doors talking together, but it was a time of some political excitement, and the inhabitants of Cacouna were keen politicians, so that there might be no particular cause for that.

Mr. Strafford was more than half expected at the Cottage that evening. The boat might be in by five, and it was nearly that time when Lucia reached home, so she took off her walking-things, and applied herself at once to making the house look bright and comfortable to welcome him, all the while listening with some anxiety for the sound of her mother's return. But Mrs. Costello did not come, and Lucia began to think that she must have gone to the wharf to meet Mr. Strafford, and that they would arrive together. She made Margery bring in the tea-things, and had spent no small trouble in coaxing the fire into its very brightest and warmest humour, the chairs into the cosiest places, and the curtains to hang so that there should not be the slightest suspicion of a draught, when at last the welcome sound of the gate opening was heard, and she ran to the door; there indeed stood Mr. Strafford, but alone.

Lucia forgot her welcome, and greeted him with an exclamation of surprise and disappointment; then suddenly recollecting herself, she took him into the bright sitting-room and explained why she was astonished to see him alone.

"I came straight from the wharf," he said, "and have seen nothing of Mrs. Costello, but I will walk back along the road and meet her."

This, however, Lucia would not hear of.

"Margery shall go a little way," she said; "mamma cannot be long now."

So Margery went, while Mr. Strafford questioned Lucia as to all she knew of Christian's condition. She told him, with little pauses of listening between her sentences, for she was growing every moment more uncontrollably anxious. At

length both started up, for the tinkle of sleigh bells was heard coming up the lane. Again Lucia flew to the door, and opened it just as the sleigh stopped.

"Mamma!" she cried, "are you there?" and to her inexpressible relief she was answered by Mrs. Costello's voice.

"But why are you so late?" was the next question.

"I will tell you all presently. Pay the man, dear, and let him go. Or stay, tell him to come for me at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

Mrs. Costello was sitting by the fire when Lucia came back from her errand. She looked excessively pale and tired, but in her face and in that of Mr. Strafford as he stood opposite to her there was a light and flicker of strong excitement. Both turned to Lucia, and Mrs. Costello held out her hand.

Lucia came forward, and seeing something she could not understand, knelt down by her mother's knee and said, "What is it?"

"Good news, darling, good news at last!" Mrs. Costello tried to speak calmly, but her voice shook with this unaccustomed agitation of joy. "He is innocent!" she cried, and covered her face with her hands.



CHAPTER XIV.

It was long before the one single fact of Christian's innocence—proved, unquestionable innocence—had become sufficiently real and familiar for the mother and daughter to hear or to tell how the truth had come to light, and the justice of Heaven been swifter and surer than that of man. But at length all that Mrs. Costello knew was told; and in the deep joy and thankfulness with which they saw that horrible stain of murder wiped out, they were ready to forget even more completely than before, all the disgrace which still clung to the miserable prisoner, and to welcome him on his release with no forced kindness.

"On his release? Ought he not to be with them now?"

Lucia asked the question.

"He does not yet even know all," Mrs. Costello answered. "He is so excessively weak that they dared not tell him till to-morrow."

"To-morrow, then, he will be here?"

"No, that is impossible. There is much to be done first; but very soon I hope."

Yet both doubted in their hearts whether the shadow—ever deepening—of approaching death could yet be so checked as to suffer the prisoner to breathe the free air for which he pined.

Meanwhile, the story was being told by every fireside in Cacouna with more of wonder and of comment than by that one where it had the deepest interest. And it was a tale that would be remembered and repeated for years, though no living man could tell it all.

That morning Clarkson had been for some hours at Cacouna. He had various places to go to, and both sales and purchases to make, but he found time, as usual, to visit more than one place where whisky was sold; and when at last he drove out of the town, he had but just enough power of self-control to keep himself from swaying about visibly as he sat in his sleigh. He was in boisterous spirits, and greeted every acquaintance he met with some rough jest—pointless but noisy—singing snatches of songs, and flourishing his whip with an air of tipsy bravado. At a small tavern near the sawmill he dismounted for the last

time.

It was a little after noon, and several of the men employed about the mill were lounging round the stove in the tavern when Clarkson went in. He found some of his own particular associates among the group, and, being in a generous humour, he pulled out a dirty dollar-note and ordered glasses round. These were followed by others; and when, after another half-hour, he got into his sleigh again, he was quite beyond the power of guiding his horse, or even of seeing where he was going. He was more noisy than ever; and as he started off, some of his more sober companions shouted warnings after him, and stood watching him as he went, with a pretty strong feeling that he was not likely to reach home safely.

In fact, he had proceeded but a little way across the open plain where Dr. Morton's body had been found when he took a wrong direction, and, instead of keeping a tolerably straight line towards his own home, he turned to the left, following a track which led to the water's edge, and ran beside it, over broken and boggy ground, until after making a semicircle it rejoined the principal road on the further side of the plain. No sober man would have chosen this track, for it was heavy for the horse, and was carried over several rough bridges across the large drains which had lately been cut to carry off the water from the swamp. The deep snow which had fallen, with little previous frost, lay soft and thick over the whole ground; it covered the holes in the bridges, and so choked up the drains that in many places they were completely concealed, and what appeared to be a smooth level surface of ground might really be a dangerous pitfall. Here, however, Clarkson chose to go. He flogged his horse unmercifully, and the sleigh flew over the ground, scattering the snow and striking every moment against some roughness of the road which it concealed. They passed one of the drains safely, though the round logs of which the bridge was formed shook and rattled under them; but between that and the next, the tipsy driver turned quite out of the track, and drove on at the same headlong pace towards the open trench. At the very brink the horse stopped; he tried to turn aside, but a tremendous lash of the whip urged him on; he leaped forward and just cleared the drain, but the weight of the sleigh dragged him backwards, and the whole mass crashed through the snow and the thin ice under it into the bottom of the cutting.

Some of the men who had watched Clarkson drive off from the tavern had not yet returned to their work, and the place where the accident happened was not so far off but that something of it could be seen. Two or three started off, and soon arrived at the spot where the sleigh had disappeared.

The drain, though deep, was not very wide, and if, even at the very moment of the fall, Clarkson had been capable of exerting himself, he might have escaped; as it was, he lay among the broken fragments of his sleigh and shouted out imprecations upon his horse, which had been dragged down on the top of him. But when the poor animal was freed from the harness, and with as much care as possible removed from the body of its master, a much harder task remained. Clarkson was frightfully hurt—how, they could hardly tell, but it seemed as if his head and arms were all that had escaped. The rest of his body appeared to be dead; he had not the smallest power to move, and yet there was no outward wound, and his voice was as strong as ever. They raised him with the greatest gentleness and care, and bringing up the bottom of the broken sleigh, laid his helpless limbs on it compassionately, and carried him back to the tavern, paying no heed to the flood of curses which he constantly poured out.

When they reached the tavern, they found the doctor already there, and, going out of the house, they waited till he should have made his examination and be able to tell them its result. After some time he came, closing the door behind him and looking very grave.

"What's wrong with him, sir?" one of the men asked.

"Everything. He cannot live many hours."

There was a minute's silence, and then somebody said,

"Should not his missus be fetched?"

"Yes, poor woman, the sooner the better. Who will go?"

"I will, sir," and one of the oldest of the group started off immediately to the mill to get the necessary permission from his master.

"Now," said the doctor, "there's another thing. Who will take my horse and go into Cacouna and fetch Mr. Bayne out here? I do not mean to leave Clarkson myself at present."

Another volunteer was found, and the doctor, having scribbled a pencil note to Mr. Bayne, sent him off with it and went back into the house. There was already a change in his patient. An indefinable look had come over the hard, sunburnt face, and the voice was weaker. Why the doctor had sent for Mr. Bayne, whom for the moment he regarded not as a clergyman, but as a magistrate, he himself best knew. Clarkson had no idea of his having done so; nor had he yet heard

plainly that his own fate was so certain or so near. But it was no part of the doctor's plan to leave him in ignorance. He went to the side of the settee where the dying man lay, and sitting down said,

"I have sent for your wife."

Clarkson looked at him suspiciously.

"What's that for?" he asked. "Can't they take me home? I should get well a deal sooner there than in this place."

"You cannot be moved. In fact, Clarkson, there is no chance of your getting well anywhere."

Clarkson turned his head sharply.

"Say out what you mean," he cried with an oath.

"I intend to do so. You are not likely to live till night."

The wretched man tried to raise himself, but his will had no power over his body. He turned his head round with a groan, and hid his face against the wall.

There were other people in the house; but since Clarkson had been brought in, they kept as much as possible at the further end, and could not hear what passed unless it was intended that they should. Presently Clarkson again looked round, and there was a new expression of terror and anxiety in his eyes.

"Are you *sure*?" he asked. "Quite certain I can't get well?"

"Quite certain. There is not the shadow of a chance."

"Look here, then; I have something to say."

"It had better be said soon."

"I say, Doctor, is that Indian fellow really going to die?"

"What Indian fellow?"

"The one in jail—the one that they say killed Doctor Morton."

"He is very ill. Why do you say that they *say* he killed Doctor Morton?"

"Because he did not do it, and I know who did."

"Is that what you have to tell?"

"I'd have let him hang, mind; I'd never have told a word. But it's to be me after all!" He stopped and groaned again heavily.

"Look here, Doctor," he went on, "you'll just remember this, will you? My missus knows nothing about it—not a word; and don't let them go and bother her about it afterwards. Will you promise?"

"The best way to keep her from being troubled is to tell the truth yourself."

"Well, I'll do it then, for her. She's a good one."

He was silent again for a minute, resolute not to let even the thoughts of his good wife, who loved him through all his faults, change his hard manner to any unusual softness.

In the pause the sound of sleigh bells outside was heard, and through the window the doctor caught sight of his own little sleigh, with Mr. Bayne in it, coming up to the door of the house.

"Now, Clarkson," he said, "you see that the best thing for everybody is, that you should tell the exact truth about that murder. I am not going to talk to you about the benefit it may be to yourself to make what amends you can for the wrong you have done, but I can tell you that Christian has friends who would be glad to see him cleared; and if you will tell all the truth now, late as it is, I think I may promise that they will look after your wife and children."

The doctor spoke fast, having made up his mind to deliver this little speech before they were interrupted. Then he went to the door and opened it, just in time to admit Mr. Bayne.

When they came together to Clarkson's side, he was lying quite quiet, considering. His paralysed condition and fast increasing weakness seemed to keep down all excitement. He was perfectly conscious, but it was a sort of mechanical consciousness with which emotion of any kind had very little to do. Mr. Bayne, who did not yet know why he had been sent for, but thought only of the dying man's claim upon him as a clergyman, spoke a few friendly words and sat down near the settee.

Clarkson motioned the doctor also to sit down.

"Must I tell *him*?" he said in a low voice.

"You had better. He is a magistrate, you know."

"Yes; all right. Tell him what it is about; will you?"

"Clarkson wants to tell you the exact truth about the murder which took place here in autumn," the Doctor said. "There is not much time to lose."

"That's it." And Clarkson began at once. "To begin with, it was not the Indian at all. He never saw Doctor Morton that I know of, and I am certain he never saw him alive that day. He happened to be lying asleep under the bushes, that's all he had to do with it."

"But who did it then?" Mr. Bayne asked.

"Who should do it? He wanted to turn me out of my farm that I had cleared myself; one day he pretty nearly knocked me down, and every day he abused me as if I was a dog. *I* killed him."

He stopped. All the exultation of his triumph was not quite conquered yet. He had killed his enemy.

"That day," he went on, "I was going down to the mill; I had a big stick in my hand that I had but just cut, and I thought what a good one it would be to knock a man down with. I was going along, in and out among the bushes, when I caught sight of him coming riding slowly in front. I knew he was most likely going to the creek, for it seemed as if he could not keep from meddling with me continually, and I did not want to talk to him, so I slipped into a big bush to wait till he was gone by. I declare I had no thought of harming him, but he always put me in a rage, so I did not mean to speak to him at all. Well, he came close up, and all of a sudden I thought I should like to pay him out for hitting me with his whip, and I just lifted up my stick and knocked him over. It was a sharper blow than I meant it to be, for the blood ran down as he fell. He lay on the grass, and I was going to walk back home when I saw that my stick was all over blood, and there was some on my hands too. That made me mad with him, because I thought I might be found out by it. I went a little way further to hide the stick, and I saw a man lying down. Then I thought *he* might have seen me and I should have to quiet him too, but he was fast asleep, and did not move a finger; that made me think of putting it on him. He had a big knife stuck in his belt, but it had half fallen out, and I took it that I might put some of the blood on it. When I

came back with it to the place, I found that Doctor Morton had moved. I had not meant at first to kill him, but when I saw that he was alive I was vexed, and thought if I left him so he would be sure to know who had hit him, so I finished him. I wanted to make people believe that it was the Indian who had done it, and they did. That is all I've got to tell."

Nearly the whole story had been told in a sullen, monotonous tone, and when it was finished Clarkson shut his eyes and turned a little away from his auditors, as if to show that he did not mean to be questioned. They did indeed try to say something to him of his crime, but he would not answer, and presently the doctor, after leaning over him for a moment, motioned Mr. Bayne to be silent. Death was quickly approaching, and it was useless to trouble the dying man further. After a little while the man who had gone for Mrs. Clarkson arrived, with the poor woman half stunned by the shock of his news, and the two gentlemen left husband and wife together.

Later Mr. Bayne came back to his post in the more natural and congenial character of a Christian priest; but Clarkson was not a man to whom a deathbed repentance could be possible. The one human sentiment of his nature—a half-instinctive love of wife and children—was the only one that seemed to influence him at the last, and from the moment of his confession he spoke little except of them. Gradually his consciousness began to fail, and he spoke no more. Two hours later the doctor and Mr. Bayne quitted the house together. All was over. Clarkson's turbulent life had ended quietly, and all that was left of him was the body, over which a faithful woman wept.

When Mr. Bayne returned to Cacouna he went straight to Mr. Bellairs and told him the truth; not many minutes after, Mr. Bellairs hurried to the jail. He felt anxious that he himself, the nearest connection of Dr. Morton, should be the first to make what reparation was possible to the innocent man who had already suffered so much. He did not know how grave Christian's illness had become, and he thought the hope of speedy liberation would be the best possible medicine to him. But when he saw Elton and asked for admission to the prisoner, he heard with dismay that the discovery had come too late, and that his plan was impracticable. Elton did not hesitate in the least about letting him enter the room.

"Half the town might go in and out," he said, "and he would take no notice of them, but I do not know about telling him of a sudden. Perhaps, sir, you'd ask Mrs. Costello?"

"Mrs. Costello! Why? Is she here?"

"Yes, sir; and she seems to be to know more about him than even my wife who nursed him what she could, ever since he's been ill."

"It might be as well to consult her, then; could you ask her to speak to me?"

"Well, sir, if you like to go up into the room; it's a large one, and you may talk what you please at the further side; he'll never hear."

Accordingly they went up. Mrs. Costello was sitting beside her husband, and had been talking to him. He had been for a short time quite aroused to interest in what she said, but very little fatigued him, and they were both silent when the door softly opened to admit the unexpected visitor. Mrs. Costello rose with a strange spasm at her heart. She foresaw news, but could not guess what, and she trembled as Mr. Bellairs shook hands with her.

"Do you think," he said at once, "that it would be safe to tell him good news?"

She looked at him eagerly, and he in turn was startled by the passionate interest that flashed into her face.

"What news?" She asked in a quick vehement whisper.

"That he is proved innocent; that the murderer has confessed."

"Is it true?"

"It is perfectly true. I have just left Mr. Bayne, who heard the confession."

"Thank God!"

She felt her limbs giving way, and caught at the corner of the table for support, but would have fallen if Mr. Bellairs had not prevented it, and laid her on a sofa which had been lately brought into the room.

He hurried to the door, and just outside it met Mrs. Elton, who came to Mrs. Costello's assistance. It was very long, however, before the faintness could be overcome, and when that was at last accomplished, Christian had fallen asleep; they waited then for his waking, and meanwhile Mrs. Costello heard from Mr. Bellairs the outline of what had happened.

At last Christian awoke, and Mrs. Costello begged herself to tell him as much of the truth as it might be safe for him to hear, but she found it extremely difficult

to make him understand. If she could have said to him, "You are free, and I am going to take you away from here," it would have been easy; as it was, she even doubted whether he at last understood that the accusation which had caused his imprisonment was removed. But to herself the joy was infinite. The last few weeks had taught her to look at things in a new aspect, and the removal of the last horrible burden which had been laid upon her made all the rest seem light.

Mr. Bellairs, much wondering at her agitation, wished to accompany her home, but she longed to be alone, and sending for a sleigh, she left the jail, and reached home at last with her happy tidings.



CHAPTER XV.

Mrs. Costello leaned back in her chair, and Mr. Strafford watched her from under the shadow of his hand. Since the winter set in she had taken to wear a soft white shawl, and her caps were of a closer, simpler make than they used to be—perhaps these changes made her look older. It was impossible, too, that she should have passed through the trouble of the last few months without showing its effects to some degree, and yet it seemed to her old friend that there was more alteration than he could see occasion for. Her face had a weary, worn-out look, and the hand that lay listlessly on the arm of her chair was terribly thin. Those fainting fits, too, of which Lucia had told him, and the one which she had had that day, were alarming. He knew the steady self-command which she had been used to exert in the miseries of her married life, and judged that her long endurance must have weakened her physical powers no little before she was so far conquered by emotion. He consoled himself, however, with the idea that her sufferings must be now nearly at an end, and that she was so young still that she could only need rest and happiness to recover. He said this to himself, and yet meantime he watched her uneasily, and did not feel at all so sure of her recovery as he tried to persuade himself he did.

There had been a long silence; for, after Mrs. Costello had told her story, there was enough to occupy the thoughts of all, and after a while each feared to break upon the other's reverie. And as it happened, the meditations of the two elder people had turned in almost the same direction, though they were guided by a different knowledge of circumstances. Mrs. Costello knew that to be true which Mr. Strafford only vaguely feared; she was thoroughly aware of the precarious hold she had on life, and how each fresh shock, whether of joy or sorrow, hastened the end. Her one anxiety was for Lucia, and the safe disposal of her future. She told herself often that her cares were exaggerated, but they would stay with her nevertheless, and rather seemed to grow in intensity with every change that occurred. But to-night, certainly, a gleam of the hope which she had of late, so carefully shut out, again crossed her mind. How great a change had come since morning, since last night, when she wrote that final decisive letter to Maurice! It was already on its way to England, she knew, for it chanced to be the very time for the mail starting; and there would be an interval of a week between its arrival and that of any later intelligence. For a week Maurice would believe

Lucia's father to be a murderer, and if *then*, in spite of all, he remained faithful to his old love, would he not have an unanswerable right to claim her—would there be any excuse for denying his claim since her father was proved to be innocent? The belief that he would be faithful was, after all, strong in Mrs. Costello's mind; she who had known Maurice all his life knew perfectly that no considerations, which had himself in any way for their object, would have the smallest weight with him against his love, or even against what he chose to consider his honour.

Her face unconsciously brightened while she thought over all these things, and suffered herself again to dwell on her old favourite idea without being in the least doubtful as to Lucia's final consent. Yet while she thus laid the foundation for new castles in the air, Lucia herself was busy with thoughts and recollections not too favourable to her mother's plans.

Percy, not Maurice, filled *her* mind. She went back, in her fancies, to the night when he had told her she must go with him to England, and she had been so happy and so ignorant of all that was to separate them. Then she thought of the next day, and how she had sent him away, and told him that it would disgrace him to marry her. Somehow the disgrace which had weighed so heavily on her then seemed marvellously light now, since she had known one so much deeper; and in the blessed sense of freedom which came to her through Clarkson's confession, she was ready to think that all else was of small consequence. Did not girls marry every day whose fathers were all that her father had been? Ah, not *all*; there was always that Indian blood, which, though it might be the blood of kings and heroes, put its possessor on a level with the lowest of Europeans, or rather put him apart as something little higher than a brute. She knew this; but to-night she would not think of it. She would only see what she liked; and for the first time began to weave impossible fabrics of hope and happiness. Where was he, her one lover, for she thought of no other? She had no fear of a rival with him, not even of that Lady Adeliza, of whom she had heard, and whom she had once feared. Now she knew that he really had loved *her*, and feared nothing; for even supposing that he would in time forget her, love had not had time to change yet. And need it change at all? She and her mother were going by-and-by to Europe, and there they might meet. Who could tell?

But all these things which have taken so long to say took but a few minutes to think; and of the three who sat together, neither would have guessed how long a train of ideas passed through the brains of the others in the interval of their talk. Mrs. Costello was the first to rouse herself.

"You do not yet know," she said to Mr. Strafford, "what my plans for to-morrow are. I meant to ask you to go with me to the jail, and Mr. Leigh has kindly offered to join us."

"You have quite decided, then, to let everybody know?"

"I *had* quite decided; and now, even if I still wished to keep the secret, it is too late."

"Why?"

"I have already told Mr. Leigh and his son; and besides that, Mr. Bellairs and Mrs. Elton must both have wondered why I should be more excited by what we heard to-day than anybody else."

"That is true; but, from what you have told me, I had begun to doubt whether you need acknowledge your relationship. It seems by no means certain now that to do so would be of much benefit to Christian."

"It would give me the right to be with him constantly. We have made up our minds, both Lucia and I, as to what we are to do. Don't, please, try to alter our plans."

"I hesitate," he answered, "only because you have already suffered so much, and I fear the excitement for you."

"All the excitement possible on that subject is over. You will see that I shall take what has to come yet quietly enough. And I am certain that you will not tell me that a wife is excusable if she neglects a dying husband."

"Assuredly not. You will be glad to have Mr. Leigh with you?"

"For some things, yes. Yesterday I thought that there was no one whose presence could have been such a comfort to me; for, except himself, our greatest friends here are, as you know, the nearest connections of Dr. Morton; so that till this confession, which has done so much for us, I could not have asked for sympathy or help from them."

"No; but now they would give it readily enough if they knew. What do you think of going first to Mrs. Bellairs, or asking her to come to you? It seems to me that, if that were not the most comfortable thing for you, it would be for Lucia."

Lucia looked eagerly at her mother.

"Yes, mamma," she said; "let me go into Cacouna in the morning, and ask her to come and see you. Do tell her first, and let her tell Bella."

Mrs. Costello understood how her child caught at the idea of being relieved from the sense of deceit which had lately weighed upon her whenever she was in the company of her two friends. The idea, too, of telling her secret to the kindly ear of a woman rather than to men, was an improvement on her own purpose. She assented, therefore, thankfully.

"Only," she said, "there is no need for you to go. I will write a note to Mrs. Bellairs, and I think she will come to us."

But, as it happened, the note, although written, was not sent. On the following morning, just as breakfast was over at the Cottage, Mrs. Bellairs' pony and sleigh came to the door, and, after a hasty inquiry for Mrs. Costello, Mrs. Bellairs herself came in.

"William told me," she said, "that he had seen you yesterday, and that you were not well; so I thought the best thing I could do was to come myself, and see how you were to-day."

There were a few minutes of talk, like, and yet unlike, what might have taken place between the same party at any other time—unlike, for each was talking of one thing, and thinking of another; even Mrs. Bellairs, who had, of course, heard from her husband the history of her friend's extraordinary and unaccountable agitation at the jail, and was full of wonder and curiosity in consequence.

After a little while Mr. Strafford left the room. Lucia was watching for an opportunity to follow him, when her mother signed to her to remain, and at once began to speak of what had happened yesterday.

"That unhappy man's confession," she said, "must have been a relief to you all, I should think; but you cannot guess what it was to us."

"It was a relief," Mrs. Bellairs answered, "for it will save so much horrible publicity, and the going over again of all that dreadful story; but it is shocking to think of that poor Indian, shut up in prison so long when he was innocent. But William will not rest till he is at liberty."

"I fear he will never be that. He is dying."

"Oh! I hope not. William told me he was very ill; but when we get him once free,

he must be taken good care of, and surely he will recover."

"I think not. I do not think it possible he can live many days; and no one has the same interest in the question that I have."

She stopped a moment, and then, drawing Lucia towards her, laid her hand gently on her shoulder.

"Dear friend," she said, "you have spoken to me often about this child's beauty; look at her well, and see if it will not tell you what her father was."

Mrs. Bellairs obeyed. Lucia, under the impulse of excitement, had suddenly risen, and now stood pressing one hand upon the mantelpiece to steady herself. Her eyes were full of a wistful inexplicable meaning; her whole figure with its dark and graceful beauty seemed to express a mystery, but it was one to which no key appeared.

"Her father?" Mrs. Bellairs repeated. "He was a Spaniard, was not he?"

"I have never said so. People imagined it, and I was glad that they should, but it is not true."

"Who then? She is dark like a Spaniard or Italian."

"Are there no dark races but those of Europe?"

"*What* do you mean? Tell me, for Heaven's sake!"

"You have always thought me a widow, yet my husband is still alive. I left him long ago when he did not need me; now he is ill and in prison, and I am going back to him. He is Christian, whom you have all thought a murderer."

"Christian! the Indian? Impossible! Lucia, can this be true?"

"It is true."

"And you knew it all this time?"

"Yes. All the time."

"My poor child, what misery! But I cannot understand. How can this be?"

"Do you not shrink from us! We tell you the truth. We are not what you have always known us; we are only the wife and daughter of an Indian."

"Don't—don't speak so. What difference can it make to me? Only, how could you bear all you must have borne? It is wonderful. I can scarcely believe it yet."

"Do not suppose that Lucia has been deceiving you all these years; *she* only knew the truth a few months ago."

"But there is no deceit. You had a right to keep such a secret if you chose." Mrs. Bellairs rose. She stepped to Lucia's side and kissed her pale cheeks. "You must have had Indian courage," she said, "to be so brave and steady at your age."

Lucia returned the kiss with an earnestness that expressed a whole world of grateful affection. Then she slipped out of the room, and left the two friends together.

They both sat down again; this time side by side, and Mrs. Costello told in few words as much of her story as was needful. She dwelt, however, so lightly on the sufferings of her life at Moose Island that any one, who had known or loved her less than Mrs. Bellairs did, might have thought she had fled with too little reason from the ties she was now so anxious to resume. She spoke very shortly, too, of the fears she had had during the past summer of some discovery, and mentioned

having told Lucia her true history, without any allusion to the particular time when it was told. Mrs. Bellairs recollected the meeting with the squaw at the farm, and inquired whether Lucia then knew of her Indian descent.

"No," Mrs. Costello said, "that was one of the things which alarmed me. I did not tell her till some time after that; not, indeed, until after Bella's marriage."

"Poor child! and then for this terrible trouble to come! No wonder you are both changed."

"Do you think *her* changed?" Mrs. Costello asked in alarm. "She has been so brave."

"She has grown to look much older and as if she thought too much; that is all. And *that* is no wonder."

Mrs. Costello was silent for a moment. She knew that Lucia had had another burden, especially her own, to bear, and it seemed to her that Mrs. Bellairs must know or guess something of it too. If she did, it would be as well for her to know the exact truth. She made up her mind at once.

"I found that it was necessary to tell her," she said, "just before Mr. Percy went away."

Mrs. Bellairs looked at her inquiringly.

"I was afraid," she answered, "that he was likely to cause you some uneasiness."

"He did more than that," Mrs. Costello said. "He gave Lucia her first hard thoughts of her mother. But after all I may be doing him injustice. Did you know that he really wanted to carry her away with him?"

"He *did*! And she refused him?"

"She refused him, when she knew her own position, and the impossibility of her marrying him."

"Dear Mrs. Costello, what complications! I begin to understand now all that has puzzled me."

"You had some suspicion of the truth?"

"Of part of it. I don't like Edward Percy, and I was afraid he was gaining an influence with Lucia which would make her unhappy. I even thought at one time

that he was really in earnest, but from some news we received a few days ago I set that down as a mistake."

"News of him? What was it?"

"That he is engaged to a lady whom his father wished him to marry; and that they are to be married almost immediately."

"I am very glad," Mrs. Costello said, "and there is nothing to be surprised about. He was tempted for the moment by a pretty face, but he was not a man to waste time in thinking about a girl who had refused him."

She said this; but she thought in her heart, 'He is not like Maurice. If Lucia had refused him so, he would have known that she loved him still; and while she did so, he would have had no thoughts for any other.' She asked, however,

"Did you hear from *him* that this was true?"

"No. But it was from an old college friend of my husband's who is now in England."

"I do not see any use in telling Lucia. She dismissed him herself, and is, I hope, fast forgetting him in all these other affairs that have come upon us."

"Surely she cannot have cared enough for him to feel the separation as she would have done if he had really been worth loving," Mrs. Bellairs added; and then they left the subject, quite forgetting that reason and love seldom go hand-in-hand, and that Lucia was still devoutly believing in two falsities: first, that Percy was capable of a steady and faithful affection, and secondly, that he must still have something of that affection for her. Even at this very moment she was comforting her heart with this belief; and the discovery that her mother's dearest friends showed no inclination to desert them in their new character, filled her with a kind of blind sweet confidence in that one whom, as she now thought, she had treated so ungenerously, and who did not yet know their secret.

In the parlour, meanwhile, many things were discussed. Mrs. Bellairs assured her friend that the necessary arrangements for Christian's release had already been commenced, and that Mr. Bellairs would see that there was not a moment's delay which could be avoided. On the other hand, however, there was strong in Mrs. Costello's mind the doubt whether her husband would live to be removed. The utmost she now hoped for, with any certainty, was to have liberty to be with him constantly till the end. Finally, she told Mrs. Bellairs of her intention of going to

the jail that day and announcing her claim to the first place by the prisoner's sick bed. Mrs. Bellairs thought a little over this plan, then she said,

"It is impossible that in this weather you can be constantly going backwards and forwards between here and the jail. At our house you would be scarcely three minutes' drive away, and there is always the sleigh and Bob. You and Lucia must come and stay with us."

And to this plan after much opposition and argument they were all obliged to give in; Mr. Strafford and Lucia were called into council, but Mrs. Bellairs was resolved.

"You shall see nobody," she said. "You shall be exactly as much at liberty as if you were at home, and it will spare you both time and strength for your nursing. It will do Bella good, too; and if we can be of any use or comfort to you, it will seem a kind of reparation."



CHAPTER XVI.

The end of the conference was that Mr. Strafford started alone for the jail, while Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Bellairs went together to Mr. Leigh, to explain to him the new state of affairs; and after that, drove back to Cacouna, whither Lucia also was to follow later. Mr. Strafford could at that time spare but one day for his friends. He was to leave by the evening's boat; and the Cottage was for the present to be deserted, except by Margery.

Mr. Strafford was admitted with, if possible, even less hesitation than usual to Christian's room. Every one understood now that the prisoner was entirely innocent, and in the revulsion of feeling, every one was disposed to treat with all tenderness and honour as a martyr the very man who, if he had never been falsely accused, they would probably have regarded only with disgust or contempt.

Not that there was room for either feeling *now*. It was as if this man's history had been written from beginning to end, and then the ink washed from all the middle pages. What memory he had left, went back to the days when he had been a pupil of the Jesuit priests, and the traces of that time remained with him, and were evident to all. But all was blank from those days to these, when he lay in the wintry sunshine dying, and scarcely conscious that he was dying in a prison. When a voice out of that forgotten past spoke to him, his recollection seemed to revive for a moment, and he answered in English or in Ojibway, as he was addressed. At other times, if he began to speak at all, it was in French, the most familiar language of his boyhood, and sometimes scraps of the old priestly Latin would come to his lips as he lay half dozing, and dreaming perhaps of his life in the mission-school, and the time when he was to have been a teacher of his own people. Chiefly, however, he lay quite silent, and seemed neither to see nor to hear what took place around him. His face, where the hand of death was already visible, had more of its original beauty than Mr. Strafford had ever seen on it before; and as he came near to the bedside, he for the first time began to comprehend, what had always till now been an enigma to him, why Mary Wynter had loved and married her husband.

Christian roused himself little when he perceived his visitor, and Mr. Strafford seized the opportunity of speaking to him on the subject of his imprisonment, as

a step towards the great news he had to tell.

"You will be glad," he said, "when you can go away from here. It will be very soon now, perhaps."

"No," was the answer. "I do not want to go now. If they could take away a large piece of that wall," he went on dreamily, "so that I could breathe and see the sky, that is all I care for now."

"You would like, however, to know that you *can* go away when you please?"

Christian looked at him earnestly.

"But it is a prison," he said. "How do you mean, that I can go away?"

"Do you recollect why you were brought here?"

"Yes. They thought I had killed somebody. It was all a mistake. I knew nothing about it; but everybody thought I did."

"They know now that it *was* a mistake. The man who really did it, has told all."

"And now?"

"Now you are proved to be innocent. In a very short time you will be free."

"Free? I shall be free?"

For a moment the dying man raised himself upright. His eyes flashed and his face glowed as if that thought of freedom had yet power to bring him back to life. Then he fell back again, and clasped his thin hands over his eyes.

"Too late," he muttered, "too late!"

Then he began to talk about things that belonged to that former life which seemed constantly present to his mind. He talked to himself at first in a half whisper; then, noticing Mr. Strafford, who still sat by his bedside, he took him for one of his former masters, and spoke to him in French.

"Mon père," he said, "pray do not be angry with us. We lost our way, and that is why we have been so long. The woods are green still, but the ground is soaked with rain, and it is hard to get through the bushes, and we are very tired."

A long sigh of weariness followed the words; and the prisoner fell into one of his

frequent dozes.

So the great news had been told, and this was all its effect. Yes, Christian was right; it was too late. Clarkson's work had been well done; and his second victim was past all human aid.

Mr. Strafford sat and watched; and while he watched, he thought over all that he had known of the lives of these two, Christian and his wife, who now occupied his mind so fully. He was still thinking when the doctor came to pay his daily visit. The two had not met before, but each knew the other well by report; and to-day each was anxious to question the other on the same subject. Mr. Strafford, however, was most anxious, and began first.

"You know, of course," he said, "what I suppose all Cacouna is talking of. I want to know whether Clarkson's confession has really come too late?"

"Too late for what, my dear sir? For this poor fellow's justification?"

"Not exactly that, but for his liberation."

The doctor shook his head.

"I have my doubts," he said. "The only thing to be hoped is, that when he hears that he is really at liberty, it may give him a little rousing—just stimulate him sufficiently to allow of his being moved into freer air."

"If that is the only hope, it has failed already," Mr. Strafford answered, and told what had taken place.

"Then," said the doctor, "I give him up. I am afraid his life is just a matter of days, perhaps of hours; but let me go and talk to him a little, and then I will tell you my opinion."

He went to the bedside, and began talking in his brisk, cheerful way, to his patient, who was now awake. It was evident, however, that the effort to understand and remember was weaker even than it had been yesterday, and that this was the effect of increased physical prostration. There was no longer any fever to supply temporary strength; but life was dying out quietly, but hopelessly.

Mr. Strafford still waited, with some anxiety, for the decisive sentence. He had made up his mind that other questions beside and beyond that of Christian's own fate might be made to depend upon it; and it cannot be said truly that he felt

much sorrow at the idea of its being unfavourable. It was clear and decided enough, at any rate.

"He may live for two or three days. To attempt to move him would be only to hasten his death."

"You are certain that there is no hope?"

"Not a shadow."

"Do you think it likely his mind will grow any clearer towards the last?"

"I do not think it; in fact, it is extremely improbable. You see, his wandering is simply the result of weakness; as the weakness increases, the mental faculties will probably cease gradually to act at all. One can't, of course, say positively when; if he becomes quite unconscious to-night, death will probably follow in the course of the next twenty-four hours."

"Poor fellow! There is little, then, that can be done for him?"

"Next to nothing. He wants a nurse to give him some little nourishment when he wakes up, and that is pretty nearly all."

"I shall bring him the best possible nurse," Mr. Strafford said. "Mrs. Costello wishes to come and remain here."

The doctor looked at him curiously.

"Mrs. Costello is my patient also," he said; "I am half inclined to forbid her coming."

"She is your patient, doctor! How is that? I thought she was looking ill, though she denies it."

"She is not ill; but as you are an old friend and adviser, I don't mind telling you that her health is in a critical state, and that I have forbidden her all excitement and fatigue." 'Much use,' he added to himself, in a parenthesis.

Mr. Strafford looked troubled.

"She must come here, nevertheless," he said. "Even if it were possible to keep her away, it would do no good. She would excite herself still more."

"Mr. Strafford," said the doctor, "If I thought that Mrs. Costello was coming here

out of mere charity, I should tell her that charity begins at home, and that she had more reason to think of herself and her daughter than of any prisoner in the world. However, I *don't* think it; and, therefore, all I have to say is, if you have any regard for her or for Miss Costello, don't let her do more than is absolutely necessary. Good morning."

And the busy little man hurried off, and left Mr. Strafford with a new uneasiness in his mind.

Mrs. Elton, who came in and out at intervals to see if Christian wanted anything, made her appearance immediately after, and he took the opportunity of leaving. He hurried straight to Mrs. Bellairs' house, where he found the two friends but just arrived. Mrs. Costello was preparing to start for the jail, but he contrived to give a hint to Mrs. Bellairs, and they together persuaded her to take an hour's rest before doing so.

Mrs. Costello had begged Mrs. Bellairs to tell Bella the secret which she herself had just heard; and to do so without loss of time; but she did not wish to be present, or to go through another agitating scene that day. The two sisters, therefore, left her to rest, and to consult with Mr. Strafford, while Bella, already excited and disturbed by the revelations of the preceding day, heard this new and still more surprising intelligence. It did not, certainly, take many minutes to tell; but there was so much beyond the mere facts; so many recollections of words or looks that had been passed by unnoticed at the time; so much wonder at the courage with which both mother and daughter had faced the cruel difficulties of their position, that it was nearly an hour before the conversation ended, and they came back to their guests.



CHAPTER XVII.

Mr. Strafford was glad to be left alone with Mrs. Costello. He had been considering seriously what he had heard from the doctor, and what he had himself seen of Christian's state, and had come to a decision which must be carried out at once.

He answered all her questions with this view clearly before him, and explained to her solicitously how very little consequence it now was to Christian whether the hands that ministered to his few remaining wants were those of his own kindred or of pitying strangers. When he thought he had made this quite evident to her, he reminded her that there was no further question of removing either from Christian himself, or from his wife and daughter, the stain of an undeserved ignominy; he was at this very moment regarded by all who knew anything of the circumstances as a victim sacrificed to save Clarkson, and justified by the manifest interference of Providence—placed thus in a better position as regarded public opinion than he could have been by any other train of events. Thus no idea of compensation need longer be entertained; the generous yearning towards the oppressed must die now that oppression was ended; and the only result of declaring the long-concealed marriage would be to bring upon the two women who had already suffered so much in consequence of it, a fresh torture of wonder and notoriety—in short, there was no longer any sufficient reason for the relationship becoming known, and Mr. Strafford came gradually to the point of suggesting this to Mrs. Costello.

She heard him with surprise. As he went on telling her all that was meant to prepare her for this idea, she listened and assented without suspecting what was coming, but when she did understand him she said much as she had done before,

"It is too late to make any change now; three or four persons already know."

"But," Mr. Strafford answered, "they are just the persons whom you can trust, and whom, most likely you would have wished to tell, at any rate."

"That is true. You think then that the truth may still be kept secret?"

"I see no reason why it should not. Doctor Hardy suspects it, but medical men know how to keep family secrets, and as for whatever wonder your illness may

have excited in either Mrs. Elton or her husband, the doctor himself can easily set that at rest by saying what I am afraid is too true, that you are subject to fainting fits."

"You must give him a hint to do so then, please; and I know that the others whom I have told will keep silence faithfully. But then I am not yet quite convinced that silence ought to be kept."

"You still feel, however, that *not* to keep it is in some degree to sacrifice Lucia?"

"Yes. But you know that we have long ago weighed that matter. Heaven knows that my heart is in the same scale as my darling's happiness, and just for that very reason I am afraid to alter our decision."

"You are right in saying 'we.' I helped you to decide once, and I wish to change your decision now; for we yielded then to what we both believed to be the claim of duty, arising out of Christian's imprisonment and danger. Now, however, that he is quite safe, and that his very imprisonment proves to be one of the very best things that could happen to him, the case is reversed; and he is no longer the first person to be thought of."

"You do not wish to prevent me from nursing him?"

"Certainly not. I only think that you can nurse him just as effectually and tenderly without all the world knowing the claim he has upon you."

"You are quite certain that his memory and power of recognition will not return?"

Mr. Strafford repeated what Dr. Hardy had said.

"I must think," Mrs. Costello answered. "Everything has come upon me so quickly and confusingly, that I cannot decide all at once. Give me a little while to consider."

She leaned back wearily, and Mr. Strafford, taking a book, went and sat down at the further end of the room. So they remained till Mrs. Bellairs and Mrs. Morton came in together.

When they did so, Mrs. Costello looked up with a half smile,

"I am something like the old man in the fable," she said, "every new piece of advice I receive alters my plans."

"How?" asked Mrs. Bellairs. "Who has been advising you now?"

"No new adviser, at any rate. My old and tried friend there, who, I believe, gives quite as much thought to my affairs as if they were his own."

Mr. Strafford came forward.

"I have been trying to persuade Mrs. Costello," he said, "that a secret which half-a-dozen people know may yet be a secret."

"Even when half the half-dozen are women? I am sure, Mr. Strafford, we are indebted to you, if I guess truly what you mean."

A look, grave enough, passed between the two, though they spoke lightly.

"I have been thinking over all you say," Mrs. Costello went on, addressing Mr. Strafford, "and I have decided to follow your advice. But if at any moment, even the last, there should seem sufficient reason for changing my opinion, remember that I do not promise not to do so."

Mr. Strafford was fully satisfied with this; he knew, or thought he knew, perfectly, that Christian's condition was such as to ensure no further change of conduct regarding him; and not long after, he and Mrs. Costello returned together to the prison.

For two or three hours they sat beside the prisoner, and talked at intervals to each other, or to him, with long pauses of thought between. There was much for both to think of. The necessity of action seemed to be all over, or at least, to be suspended as long as Christian's life should last; and in this time of waiting, whether it were hours or days, all that could be done was to build up plans for the future which, when they were built, any one of the various possible changes of circumstances might at once overthrow.

But so entirely had Mrs. Costello identified herself with her daughter in all her habits and thoughts, that that dwelling on the future, which is the special prerogative of youth, seemed as natural to her as though her own life had all lain before, instead of behind her; and she found herself perpetually occupied with the consideration of what was best to be done for that future which had been so often taken, as it were, out of her guidance.

Sitting by her husband's deathbed, however, the long-estranged wife seemed to live a double life. The recollection of the past—of the short and secret courtship

with its illusions, greater and more perilous than love's illusions commonly are—of her first days of married life, when, in spite of her rash disobedience, she was feverishly happy; of the awaking, and total disenchantment, and the wretched years that followed, all came to her in a floating, broken vision, filling her with emotions which had, at last, lost their bitterness. She yielded to them without resistance and without effort, and sank into a long silence, which was broken at last by Mr. Strafford.

"I must leave you," he said. "The boat starts in half an hour, and I want to see Mrs. Bellairs for a moment."

Mrs. Costello roused herself.

"Good-bye, then," she answered. "Dear Mr. Strafford, you know I have long ago given up trying to thank you for all you do for me; you must accept obedience as a proof of gratitude."

"See that you do obey me then," he replied smiling, "by taking care of yourself. Have you any message for Lucia?"

"Do you not think she might come here?"

"Yes, perfectly well. Shall I tell her you expect her?"

"Please."

"And you will return to Mrs. Bellairs with her?"

"We shall see. I do not promise."

"Well, I will not ask too much. Good-bye."

He went to the bedside, took Christian's hand and bade him also good-bye. He was roused for a moment, but his thoughts still returned to the old days.

"Adieu! father," he said; "I think I shall be gone when you come back. Do you know that I am going on a journey? They will not tell me where, but I shall not forget you all here. Ask the Saints to bring me safe back."

Mr. Strafford knelt by the bed for a moment, and asked a heavenly guide for the poor wanderer on this his last journey, but he seemed to hear nothing and went on murmuring to himself,

"Ave Maria, gratia plena—"

When her friend was gone, and Mrs. Costello came back to her seat, he was still feebly repeating "pro nobis peccatoribus, pro nobis peccatoribus," with a faint trembling voice, as if even to the dulled faculties, through the deepening shadow of death, some faint distorted gleam of the truth had pierced, and the soul was, in truth, less torpid than the brain.

His wife sat by his side, and listened, deeply touched. She perceived that the part of his life with which she was associated, was dead to him; she could only stand aside and watch while the shadows of an earlier time gathered closely round him. But the more she understood this, the more a painful tenderness filled her heart towards him; she almost fancied that she had loved him all these years, and only found it out now that he had forgotten her. She began to grow impatient for Lucia's coming, and to long for the moment when she should be able to say,

"My child, this is your father."

The broad clear light of sunshine upon snow had begun to soften towards twilight when Lucia came.

Mrs. Bellairs brought her, but stayed below, that that meeting might have no witnesses. A trembling hand upon the lock warned Mrs. Costello, and she met her daughter at the door and brought her in.

Lucia had been struggling all day—ever since she knew that she was, at last, to see her father—to forget the one moment when they had met before; and all her efforts had been worse than useless. She came in, agitated and distressed, with the vision of that night clear and vivid before her recollection. So it was at the threshold. Her mother led her to the bedside, and the vision fled. Her eyes fell upon a face, little darker than her own, where not the slightest flush even of life-like colour remained, where a perfect calm had given back their natural nobleness to the worn features, and where scarcely a line was left to show the trace of life's sins or sufferings. She stood for a moment half bewildered. She knew that what she saw was but the faintest shadow of what had been, and, turning, she threw her arms about her mother's neck, and whispered,

"Ah, mamma! I understand all now."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mother and daughter watched for some time in silence. At last Lucia whispered, "May I go and tell Mrs. Bellairs that I shall remain with you?"

"Is she here, then? Go, rather, and ask her to come to me for a moment."

Lucia went, and came to Mrs. Bellairs with such strange gladness in her face that she looked as she had not done for months past.

"Will you go up to mamma?" she said. "My father seems to be asleep, and she wishes to see you."

And the two went upstairs together without further words. Mrs. Bellairs feared lest another strange face at the bedside might disturb the dying man; she lingered, therefore, at a little distance, but she, too, looked with wonder at the silent figure lying there in a kind of peaceful state, all unlike the vagrant Indian—the supposed criminal—she had heard of. Mrs. Costello came to her, and Lucia sat down in her mother's place.

"I brought you a message from William," Mrs. Bellairs said. "The order for his release is come. He is free. Is it too late?"

"Come a little nearer and see for yourself. You will not disturb him. Yes, dear friend, it is too late for any release but one to reach him now."

Mrs. Bellairs' lip trembled. "Ah, how cruel it seems!" she said. "How can you forgive us?"

"Forgive *you*? Why?"

"It seems as if we were to blame, because it was my poor Bella's loss that brought this on him."

"It was Clarkson's wickedness, nothing else. But do not let us talk of that. Some good has come out of the evil, as you see."

The eyes of both the friends rested on the father and daughter so strangely brought together. The strong likeness between them was unmistakable, yet Lucia's beauty had never been more vivid and striking than now when she

watched her dying father, with the light of such varied emotions flickering on her face.

"Poor child!" Mrs. Costello went on. "This is better than I ever hoped for her." They went nearer, and Mrs. Bellairs bent down and kissed Lucia's cheek.

"Make your mother go home with me," she whispered. "This will be more than she is equal to." Then turning again to her friend she went on, "I see you are right, and I must go back and tell my husband. You will come with me?"

"No. I have a presentiment that I shall not be needed here long; while I am, I must stay."

"But you cannot be sure, and you must not tire yourself out at the beginning."

"I shall not tire myself. I can rest here perfectly, only I cannot leave him."

"We met the doctor just now. He said he was coming here again. Will you come if he advises it?"

Mrs. Costello again shook her head.

"You all think too much of me. You must leave me here, dear Mrs. Bellairs, and Lucia can stay for an hour or two if she wishes; and tell Mr. Bellairs how much we thank him, and that nothing can be done now."

Lucia looked wistfully at her mother's pale face.

"Cannot you trust me to watch here for a little while? There seems to be so very little to do," she said; but Mrs. Costello had made up her mind, and their friend left them both together.

As she went down, the doctor was coming in. She would not leave the jail until she had heard his report; so she sat down to wait in Mrs. Elton's sitting-room.

Doctor Hardy had little expectation of finding any change. He had said to Mr. Strafford that the next four-and-twenty hours might bring the final one, but even that would come softly and gradually. He knew also that he should find Mrs. Costello installed as nurse, and guessed that she had more than an ordinary interest in her task; but for the first moment he doubted whether she knew the true state of her patient. This doubt, however, she soon ended, for she asked, as he had been asked before.

"Do you think it likely he may become conscious again?"

He shook his head.

She sighed.

"It is better so, no doubt, but I wish so much for five minutes even."

Then she remembered that she was speaking out her thoughts to one who was not in her secret. She hesitated a moment, but as her eye fell upon Lucia, she decided to trust this one more. Her voice trembled, however, as she spoke.

"You have seen already," she said, "that we are not strangers; I think I ought to tell you the truth. I am his wife; we were married long ago in England, and separated when Lucia was a baby."

Doctor Hardy bowed. He did not know exactly what to say, and saw no necessity for confessing that he had, some time ago, surmised pretty nearly the facts he was now told.

Mrs. Costello went on: "I intended to acknowledge my marriage, but since it can be of no benefit to my husband, my friends have persuaded me not to do so. But you can imagine how much I wish——" She faltered and stopped, looking at the dying man, who was never to know what care and love surrounded him at last.

"There is certainly a possibility that the stupor may pass off for a time," the doctor said, "but, my dear madam, for your sake I cannot wish it. You must be content to know that there is no pain or distress attending this state, and that it is by far the best for you and for him."

He went up to the bed and gently touched Christian's hand. It was quite powerless and chilly, but at the touch he opened his eyes, and seemed dimly to recognize his visitor. One or two questions were asked, and answered as if in a dream; then the weary eyes closed again, and all around seemed forgotten.

The doctor gave some slight directions and then left; but to Mrs. Bellairs he said,

"It is nearly over. Mrs. Costello will stay to-night, but probably before morning you will be able to get her away."

They went out together; but an hour later Mrs. Bellairs came back to wait, lest in the night the two who watched upstairs might want a friend at hand. The jailer's wife sent her husband to bed, and making a bright fire, sat up with her guest as

they had previously agreed.

Night wore on, however, and all remained still and undisturbed. About midnight Christian's doze deepened into a sound sleep, and Lucia too, sitting in the warmth of the store, slept in spite of herself. For nearly an hour the room was so still that Mrs. Costello could count every tick of her watch, and every change in the flickering sound of the wood fire. *She* had no inclination to sleep.

For this one hour she felt herself a wife like other wives—a wife and mother,—watching her husband and her child. It was still a mystery to her how this could be, but the feeling had its own exquisite sweetness, how dearly soever that sweetness was bought; and she drank it in greedily. Now and then she rose softly to assure herself that all was well, and each time the even breath and calm face spoke of rest that might have been life-giving, if there had yet been in the worn-out frame the faintest power of revival.

But between one and two o'clock Christian awoke. He did not move, but his wife, looking at him, saw his eyes open, and an indescribable difference in his aspect which made her heart leap, for she knew that his mind had awakened also, for that one last recognition that she had so longed for. She said nothing, however, but brought a few spoonfuls of wine and gave to him. He took them, watching her silently all the while, but not seeming fully to recognize her until she came and knelt down at his side, taking his cold hand in hers. Then he smiled, and turning a little towards her, said "Mary!"

She could not answer, but she bent her head down for a moment upon the hand she held.

"You have been here before?" he went on. "I remember seeing you. You have forgiven me, then?"

"Quite. Think of other things now."

"I can't think of anything except that I must be dying, and that I am glad you are here."

"I have been near you all the while you have been here; I shall not leave you again."

"No, not again—it will be such a little while, and I cannot hurt you now. Have you been happy?"

"Sometimes. I had our child."

"Where is she?"

"Here. She was tired and has fallen asleep."

"Don't wake her yet. I know I forget a great deal—everything seems far off—but just at last I wanted you, and you are here."

Both were silent for a minute. Then he spoke again—

"Mary, why did you marry an Indian?"

"Because I loved him," she said, her voice half choked by sobs.

"It was a pity. You knew nothing. They cheated you into it; but I think, though he was a brute, he loved you always. In his way, you know, as much as he could."

His mind seemed to be beginning to wander again, and his voice grew weaker. She rose, crying quietly, and gave him a little more wine. Then she touched Lucia and said, "Come, my child."

Lucia was instantly awake. She followed her mother to the bedside.

"Here is our daughter. Can you see her?"

"Not very well. Is she like you?"

"No. She is an Indian girl—strangers say she is beautiful, but to me she is only my brave, good child."

"I am glad. She will make amends. It is all right now; you will be free and safe. Good-bye."

He was silent for awhile, lying with closed eyes; and when he spoke again it was in Ojibway. He seemed to be talking to his own people, and to fancy himself out in the woods with a hunting party. After a time this ceased also, and then he began to talk confusedly in the three languages which were familiar to him, and in broken, incoherent sentences. His voice, however, grew fainter and fainter. The wine which they gave him at short intervals seemed to revive him each time for a moment; but neither of them could doubt that the end was very near.

But as it came nearer still, the delusion that had been strongest lately came back to the dying man. He again fancied himself a child—the favourite pupil of the

Jesuit fathers. He began to repeat softly, lessons they had taught him—prayers and scraps of hymns, sometimes Latin, sometimes French. Once, after a pause, he began to recite, quite clearly, a Latin Psalm—

"O Domine, libera animam meam: misericors Dominus et justus; et Deus miseretur.... Convertere, anima mea, in requiem tuam, quia Dominus benefecit tibi"—

Again there was a silence, for he was deaf to all earthly voices, and the wife and daughter knelt side by side and listened to those strange broken sentences, which seemed to come from a mind dead to all outward influences, yet not wholly unconscious of its own state.

Once he said "Mary;" but though she held his hand still clasped in hers, his wife could not make her voice heard in answer. Then he talked again murmuringly of old times; and last of all when the low musical tones had grown very feeble, but were musical still, Mary heard, "Mon Dieu, j'espère avec une ferme confiance"—There the words seemed to fail, until they grew audible again for one last moment—"la vie éternelle."

So he grew silent for ever in this life.



CHAPTER XIX.

The cold grey of the early winter morning was just beginning to be warmed by the first flash of crimson before sunrise, as Mrs. Bellairs drove away from the prison gates with the two who had kept so strange a vigil. Neither of them noticed the sky then, or they might have seen how after the shadows began to disappear, and the snowy glimmer which had shone palely all night, was swallowed up in the growing brightness of morning, everything began to be tinged with rosy splendour, and life fresh and joyous, sprang up to meet the sun. It was winter still—all last year's leaves and flowers were dead, and there was the hush of snow and frost upon everything; but over all, after storm and night came light and gladness, and the flowers would bloom again in their season.

It was quite early still and few people were stirring. They saw no one on their arrival except Bella, who was ready to run down and admit them the moment their sleigh-bells were heard. Mother and daughter went to their room, where the fire had been burning all night in readiness for their coming, and where Mrs. Bellairs herself brought them some coffee. Then Lucia lay down and was soon asleep; and Mrs. Costello seeing that she was so, followed her example.

There was no vehement grief to keep her waking in these first hours of her widowhood, but rather a sense of infinite calm. The thought of her husband, so long a daily torture and irritation, was now a sacred memory—the last few hours had been to her the renewal of her marriage vows, to which death had brought only a fuller ratification, after life's long divorce. She was very weak and weary; and but for the child beside her, would have been glad to enter herself that unseen world whose gates seemed so near, and to have rested there; but it was not time yet. So she lay and thought, calmly and soberly, till she too dropped asleep.

She kept in her room all day till quite evening. Mr. Bellairs had undertaken to make all the needful arrangements, and it was not necessary that any one should know that the real direction of affairs rested with her. Her first occupation was to write to Mr. Strafford, telling him of Christian's death, and of her own wish, that the body should be taken to Moose Island for burial. It would have to be removed as soon as possible from the jail, and she desired that it might be carried at once to her old home, where she and Lucia would be ready to receive

it. This letter was sent off by a special messenger; but as there could be no doubt of the answer, all went on at Cacouna as if it had already arrived. In the evening, when Mrs. Costello came down to join the rest of the family in the drawing-room, she had changed little of her usual gentle manner. There might be a deeper shade of gravity, but she was not, and did not appear, sad. Lucia and Bella were sitting together, talking softly. They had been speaking of the last few months—not saying much—but growing into a closer sympathy with each other, as they understood how great had been their community of sorrow, than they had ever felt in the unclouded years of their girlish friendship. It was long since Lucia had given up her fancies about Bella's marriage. The shock of her widowhood had shaken off all the gay affectations of the bride and brought her within the comprehension of Lucia's steadier and more transparent nature. And now that the secret which had stood so grimly between them was told, nothing remained to spoil the comfort of their intercourse.

Except its shortness. While they talked, an occasional sentence spoken by one or other of the elder group reached their ears, and once they stopped their conversation to listen. Mrs. Costello was saying, in answer to some question—

"To France, I think. Indeed I am sure we shall go there first."

"But," said Mrs. Bellairs, "such a voyage at this time of year! Do wait till spring."

"Except that it will be cold, I do not think the voyage will be worse now than at any other time," Mrs. Costello answered quietly.

"But, Lucia!" said Bella, "surely you are not going away now?"

"It seems that we are. Mamma has said nothing to me about it to-day, and I thought she might have given up the idea."

"Until to-day, then, you knew she intended it?"

"Yes." Lucia's cheeks grew rosy as she answered, for she remembered why the idea of European travel had seemed pleasant to her. One word from her companion might have set all those fluttering thoughts and hopes at rest; but Bella guessed nothing of them, and neither saw Lucia's change of colour, nor, if she had seen it, would have understood its cause.

"Do you think you will be long away?" she asked.

"I have no idea *now*. I think that before, mamma did not mean to come back at all."

"And you can leave Canada, and all of us so easily?"

"Oh! no, no;" and Lucia blushed more deeply than before. "Oh! Bella, I am a real Canadian girl. I should long for Canada again often, often, if I were away,—and for all of you."

"I don't see," Bella said, half sadly, half crossly, "what good it does people to go away. There is Maurice, who seems to have everything he can wish for, and yet, according to Mr. Leigh, he is perfectly restless and miserable, and wants to come back."

"Poor Maurice! if he is coming back I wish he would come before we go; but I suppose he cannot leave while Mr. Beresford lives."

"I don't see why you should care. You will see him in England; shan't you?"

"No. Mamma can't go to England. But perhaps he might come over to see us in France, if we stop there."

"Of course, he will. And if by that time you are both home sick, you can come out together again, you know."

Lucia shook her head.

"Maurice will be a great man, and have to stay at home and look after his estates, and by-and-by you will all forget us when he and Mr. Leigh are living together in Norfolk, and mamma and I are wandering—who knows where?"

Bella's hand fell softly upon her friend's; but they said no more. The others, too, had grown silent, and there was little more talk among them that night.

But after they had separated, and the mother and daughter were alone, Lucia asked whether their voyage was still really to take place immediately?

Mrs. Costello was sitting thoughtfully watching a little disk of glowing light formed by the opening in the stove door; she took her eyes from it slowly, and paused so long before answering that Lucia began to doubt whether she had heard.

"Yes," she said at last, speaking deliberately, as if she were still debating the

question in her own mind. "I believe we shall be able to arrange everything here so as to reach New York in time for the Havre steamer of the 28th. That will be our best way of going."

"That is, four weeks from to-day?"

"We may not need so long. But I wish to be at liberty to spend a week at the island, if, when we get there, I should wish to do so. I am not sure even about that. It may be more pain than pleasure. And we may trust ourselves now to say good-bye to our friends here; and if we sail on the 28th, we must leave Cacouna, on the 26th at the latest. The time will soon pass."

"Yes, indeed," Lucia answered with a sigh.

"But, mamma," she went on a minute afterwards. "Why cannot we wait till spring?" There was a kind of tremble in her voice as she spoke, for she felt a strange mixture of desire and reluctance for this journey. On one hand, she wished to reach Europe quickly, because Percy was there, and because even if they never met again, she believed she should be able to hear of him, and to satisfy herself that he still thought of her. On the other, she was really a little afraid of the winter voyage. She had never even seen the sea, and had a kind of mysterious awe of it. Stronger, however, than any selfish feeling was a keen anxiety which had taken possession of her with regard to her mother's health, the feebleness of which became daily more apparent; so that her double wishes neutralized each other, and she could scarcely tell whether if the decision rested with her, it would have been to stay or to go.

But she wanted to hear her mother's reasons, so she asked—

"Why cannot we wait till spring?"

Mrs. Costello again paused before answering. She, like Lucia, had more thoughts on the subject than she was willing to express; but she had one powerful reason for losing no time, which she decided that Lucia ought to know.

"Because I am anxious to see my cousin, who is almost our only relation, and to introduce you to him."

"But why, mamma? As we cannot go to England what good will it do us just to see him for a moment?"

"I cannot go to England, but there is nothing to prevent you from doing so."

"Oh, dear, that old idea still! It is quite useless, mamma. You shall not send me away from you."

Lucia knelt by her mother's side, and looked up into her face with eyes full of mingled entreaty and resolution. Mrs. Costello drew her close within her arm.

"No, my darling. I have given up that idea altogether. Indeed, there is no longer any need for it, and I should grudge losing you out of my sight for a single day now. But, don't you understand that a time may be coming when we shall have to part, whether we will or no?"

"Ah! not yet. There is plenty of time to think of that."

"Perhaps. But I doubt it. At any rate I have less reason than most people to count on long life."

Again Lucia looked up. A cold, unspeakable terror filled her heart, and she tried to read the secret which her mother's calm face hid from her. Mrs. Costello delayed no longer to tell her all the truth.

"Many months ago," she said, "I was convinced that the disease of which my mother died, had attacked me. I suppose there might be some hereditary predisposition towards it, and too much thought and care brought it on. I determined not to allow myself any fancies on the subject. I sent for Doctor Hardy, and contrived to see him several times during the autumn without letting you suspect anything. He could only acknowledge that I was right, and tell me to avoid excitement and fatigue. You know how possible *that* was. And so this mischief has been going on fast, and the end may be nearer than even I think it is."

Her voice faltered at the last words, and Lucia, who had listened to every one with the feeling that so many knives were being plunged through and through her heart, slipped down from her resting-place, and crouched on the floor, hiding her face and stifling the sobs that shook her whole body. She longed to cry out, to clasp her arms round her mother, to struggle, with all the force of her great love, against this fate; and yet, so well had she understood, so clearly she remembered, even through her agony, the need for quietness, that she kept a force upon herself like iron, trying to steady the pulses that throbbed so wildly, with one thought, or rather one impulse, "I must not trouble *her*."

Mrs. Costello looked at her child for a moment in silence. Even she did not yet

fully understand the force of that quality which Lucia herself had once ascribed to her Indian blood, but which, in truth, had little affinity with common fortitude, for it was simply a conquest of self, gained without thought or conscious effort, by the greater power of love. But such contests cannot last long. This was fierce and cruel, but it ended as love willed. The poor child dragged herself up again to her mother's knee, and drew the pale, fair face down to her own flushed and burning one; but one kiss, silent and full of anguish, was all that she dared venture yet. But she longed to hear more, and presently Mrs. Costello spoke again, not daring yet to go back to the point of which they had last spoken, but returning to the subject of their journey.

"The steamer calls at Southampton," she said. "I intend to write to George, and tell him the time of our sailing, so that, if he wishes, he can meet us there. We will go from Havre to Paris, and stay there for awhile; afterwards, I think we should be more comfortable in a country town, if we can find one not too inaccessible."

There was something in this sentence peculiarly reassuring. Lucia instinctively reasoned that, since her mother could make plans for their future so far in advance, the danger of which she had just spoken must be remote. What is remote, we readily believe uncertain; and thus, after a few minutes of absolute hopelessness, she began to hope again, tremblingly and fearfully, but still with more ardour than if the previous alarm had been less complete.

"Dear mamma," she said, "Doctor Hardy may be very clever, but I am not going to put any faith in him. When we get to Paris you must have the very best advice that is to be had, and you will have nothing to do but take care of yourself."

"Very well," and Mrs. Costello smiled, reading the hope clearly enough, though she had not fully read the despair. "And in the meantime you may hear what I want to say to you about my cousin."

"Yes, mamma. But you know I don't like him, all the same. I know I should have hated him just as you did when you were a girl."

"I hope not. At any rate, you must not hate him now, for I have asked him to be your guardian, and he has consented."

Lucia shuddered at that word "guardian," and the thought implied in it, but she determined to say no more about her prejudice against Mr. Wynter.

"You know," Mrs. Costello said, "that it would be much more comfortable for me to know that you were left in the care of my own people than with any one else. It will be three years before you are of age. To suppose that you may need a guardian, therefore, is neither improbable nor alarming; and my reason for proposing to settle in France is, that you may be within a short distance of him."

Lucia could only assent.

"I shall try," her mother continued, "to persuade him to pay us a visit there, and to bring his wife, who is a good woman, and I am sure would be kind to my child. I long very much, Lucia, sometimes, to know that, though I can never see the dear old home again, you may do so."

"Have they any children?" Lucia asked, her thoughts dwelling on the Wynters.

"They have lost several, George told me. There are three living, and the eldest, I think, is about your age."

They had talked themselves quite calm now. The idea of her own death had only troubled Mrs. Costello with regard to Lucia; and now that she was in some measure prepared for it, it seemed even less terrible than before. Lucia, for her part, had put by all consideration of the subject for the present; to think of it without agonies of distress was impossible, and at present to agitate herself would be to agitate her mother—a thing at any cost of after-suffering to be avoided.



CHAPTER XX.

Next morning Mrs. Costello and Lucia prepared to return to the Cottage. They were to remain there till the following evening, and then Mr. Bellairs proposed to drive them down to the first village below Cacouna at which the steamboats called, that they might there embark for Moose Island, instead of being obliged to do so at the Cacouna wharf, where they were certain to meet inquisitive acquaintances. But a short time before they were to leave their friends, Doctor Hardy called.

He asked to see Mrs. Costello, and was taken into the small room where Mrs. Bellairs usually passed her mornings. No one else was present, and he told her at once that he had called to ask her assistance in an affair which he feared would be painful to her.

She smiled gravely. "I am too grateful to you, doctor," she said, "not to be pleased that you should have anything to ask."

"I don't know," he went on, "whether Mr. Bellairs has told you the details of Clarkson's death—I mean as to what appeared to influence him in making his confession?"

"No," she answered, rather wondering what this could have to do with her.

"I think," the doctor proceeded, "that for all his brutality in other respects, Clarkson was a good husband, and as fond of his wife and children as if he had been a model of virtue. At all events, his last thought was of his wife; and I rashly promised to see that she did not suffer on his account. But I can't keep my promise without help."

He paused, not at all sure how Mrs. Costello might feel on the subject; and whether all that she and her husband had suffered might have completely embittered her towards the whole family of the murderer.

"Certainly," she answered, "it would be very hard to punish the innocent for the guilty; and I have heard nothing but good of Mrs. Clarkson."

The doctor felt relieved.

"I believe there is nothing but good that could be told of her," he said warmly. "I have known something of her for a long time, and there is not a more decent, respectable woman in the township. It is a mystery how she ever married that wretched fellow; but after she had married him she was a good wife, and did what little she could to keep him out of mischief. What is strangest of all, however, is, that she is almost heart broken, poor soul, not for his wickedness, but for his death."

"Poor thing! But the circumstances of his death must have made it more horrible to her?"

"It is a mercy that she does not seem to have understood that. She is very ill, and seems not to have had time to think yet—except that she has a vague idea that her children will starve."

"They shall not do that. You shall tell me what to do for them—that is my affair."

"Thank you. I thought you would feel for her. But the plan I have in my mind depends chiefly on Mrs. Morton, and I feel that it is asking a great deal to expect *her* to do anything."

"It is indeed. I should be almost afraid to speak to her on the subject."

"If she had had her way, I imagine, matters would never have been so bad between Doctor Morton and Clarkson. I know she was inclined to be indulgent—perhaps too indulgent—when this poor woman came to her about their rent."

"She is very kind hearted. But after her goodness has been so cruelly abused, how can one expect her now to be even just? But, indeed, you have not yet told me what you wish her to do?"

"I should like to get permission for the widow and children to stay where they are through the winter. The poor woman is very ill; she had a baby born yesterday morning, which is, happily, not likely to live, and at present, I believe, it is just the thought of her children that keeps her alive. She can't at the best be moved for some weeks, and I think if Mrs. Morton could know how she is really situated, she could not help wishing to spare her more trouble."

"I dare say you are right, and that you do Mrs. Morton more justice than I do. But Lucia might be able to help us; do you mind taking her into our councils?"

"Quite the contrary; pray consult her."

Mrs. Costello opened the drawing-room door and called Lucia. Then she explained to her shortly the doctor's wishes, and asked whether Bella had ever alluded in their conversations to Mrs. Clarkson.

"Yes; two or three times," Lucia answered. "She heard somehow yesterday that she was ill, and told me. She is very sorry for her, and I think she would be glad to do anything she can."

"Thank you, Miss Costello; you will help me, I see," cried Doctor Hardy, delighted.

Mrs. Costello smiled, "You had better leave it in Lucia's hands, doctor," she said. "But tell me first whether there is anything in particular that we can do? Is Mrs. Clarkson too ill to see any one?"

"That depends very much upon who it is. Anybody who could relieve her mind about those unfortunate children of hers would do her good."

"Perhaps I may go over then, if we have good news for her."

The doctor said good-morning, and went away, tolerably satisfied that his promise to the dying man would be fulfilled without further trouble on his part.

"When women take up a thing of that sort," he meditated, "they seldom do it by halves. Now I would venture to bet something handsome that all these three, who have cause, if ever women had, to hate the very name of Clarkson, will be just as kind and pitiful to that poor thing as if she were the only sufferer among them. *She's* all right, if we can but get her on her legs again."

This opinion was not altogether a mistaken one. Lucia went immediately to Bella and told her simply that Doctor Hardy was much concerned about Mrs. Clarkson, and that she herself was going to Beaver Creek to see what could best be done for the poor woman and her family. A quiver passed over Mrs. Morton's face. She could not yet quite free herself from the impulse of revenge which would have held her back from help and pity; she had the natural feeling which Mrs. Costello had half unconsciously imputed to her, that she ought to be the last to console the widow and children of the murderer; such feelings, however had but a momentary power over her; the idea which was most at home in her mind and took root to the extinction of the others, was just the simple womanly one that there was somebody in deep trouble whom she could help. She said shortly and without any exclamations or questions, "I will go with you; Elise wants Bob

to take your mamma home, and it will take us too long to walk, so I will send down to Lane's at once for a sleigh. Tell Mrs. Costello, Lucia, and then get ready."

There was nothing for anybody to say against Bella's going. She had always been decided and independent in her doings, and since her widowhood nobody thought of advising or persuading her. Mrs. Bellairs looked grave when she heard of this expedition, and took an opportunity of begging Lucia, to try to prevent any exciting scene, and to insist upon coming home again immediately; but even she said nothing to her sister.

The two sleighs came to the door at the same time, and as Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Bellairs drove off towards the cottage, Bella and Lucia started in the opposite direction. They had not much to say to each other on the way; and both, as they passed the fatal spot where the murder had been committed affected to be occupied with their own thoughts, that they might neither meet each other's eyes nor seem to remember where they were. They soon began to pass along the white and scarcely-trodden track which ran beside the creek. All was silent and desolate. The water, almost black by contrast with the snow, washed against the bank with a dull monotonous sound just audible; the fishing-hut had been transformed into a great heap of snow, and the branches, heavily laden, hung quite motionless under the cold grey sky. Not a sign of life appeared till they came in sight of the log-house and the light curl of smoke from its chimney. Neither had seen the place before—to Lucia, indeed, it had possessed no interest till the events of the last month or two, and she looked out with the sort of shuddering curiosity which is naturally excited by the place where we know a great crime to have been hidden in the daily life of the inhabitants. But Bella remembered many small incidents connected with this fatal property of hers—and if a wish could have brought those dark sullen waters to cover the whole farm and hide it out of sight and memory, they would have risen that moment. Yet, after all, the unchangeable fact of *her* suffering and sorrow was no reason for others suffering; she put aside for the present all the pangs of personal feeling, and prepared to go into the house with a face and manner fit for her mission.

When they reached it, all was so very still inside that they hesitated to knock; and while they paused, the woman who had undertaken the office of nurse, and who had seen the sleigh arrive, softly opened the door and admitted them. She pointed to the bed to show them that her patient was asleep; and they sat down to wait for her waking. The house contained but one room, with a small lean-to

which served the purpose of a back kitchen, and made it possible for the other apartment to have that look of almost dainty cleanliness and order which the visitors noticed. No attempt had ever been made to hide the logs, of which the walls were built. A line of plaster between each kept out the wind, and gave a curious striped appearance to the inside. The floor was of boards, unplanned, but white as snow, and partly covered by a rag carpet. In the middle of the room stood the stove, and a small table near it. An old-fashioned chest of drawers of polished oak, a dresser of pine wood and some rush-seated chairs had their places against the walls; but in the further corner stood the chief piece of furniture, and the one which drew the attention of the visitors with the most powerful attraction. It was a large clumsy four-post bedstead, hung with blue and white homespun curtains, and covered with a gay patchwork quilt. The curtains on both sides were drawn back, and the face and figure of the sleeper were in full view. She lay as if under the influence of a narcotic, so still that her breathing could scarcely be distinguished. Two or three days of intense suffering had given her the blanched shrunken look which generally comes from long illness; her face, comely and bright in health, was sunk and pallid, with black marks below the closed eyes; one hand stretched over the covers, held all through her sleep that of a little girl, her eldest child, who was half kneeling on a chair, half lying across the bed, with her head resting on the pillow. At the foot of the bed stood a wooden cradle—the covering disarranged and partly fallen on the floor, while the poor little baby, wrapped in an old blanket, lay in the nurse's arms, and now and then feebly cried, or rather moaned, as if it were almost too weak to make its complaint heard. A boy of about six sat in a low seat silently busy with a knife and a piece of wood; and a younger girl, tired of the sadness and constraint around, had climbed upon a chair, and resting one arm on the dresser, laid her round rosy cheek on it, and fallen asleep.

Mrs. Morton and Lucia were both strangers to the nurse. She merely understood that they had come with some kind intentions towards her charge, and when she had put chairs for them near the stove and seen them sit down to wait, she returned to her occupation of rocking and soothing the poor little mite she held in her arms.



CHAPTER XXI.

At last there was a movement, and a faint sigh as the sleeper awoke. Bella, by a kind of instinctive movement, rose, and holding out her arms, took the baby that the nurse might be at liberty to attend to the mother. It was a strange moment. The little creature had ceased moaning, and lay quite tranquil, its tiny face looking whiter and more wax-like under the shadow of the heavy crape veil which hung partly over it. It even seemed to nestle closer to the heart through which its touch sent so keen a stab of pain, and the young widow bent low over it as her eyes were blinded for an instant by a vision of what might have been. What might have been! The happiness she had just begun to taste, the hope that would have made her future bright, had been crushed together by this child's father—yet the frail little creature lay tenderly cradled in her arms. She looked at it; she touched the soft cheek with her cold and trembling lips; she seemed by her own will to press the sting through and through her heart; and as she did so, she saw and accepted her part in life—to have henceforth no individual existence, but to fill her solitary days with thoughts of charity, and to draw from the recollection of her own anguish the means of consolation for the griefs of others.

Lucia turned away. She guessed something, though but little, of her friend's thoughts, and moved towards the bed, to be ready to speak to Mrs. Clarkson. The little girl, released by her mother's waking, slipped down, and joined her brother, and Lucia, seeing herself perceived, went round to the place she had occupied.

"I do not know whether you know me, Mrs. Clarkson," she said. "I am Lucia Costello. Doctor Hardy told my mother of your illness, and she sent me to see whether we cannot be of some use to you or the little ones."

Lucia had puzzled beforehand over what she should say, but finally her little speech was just what happened to come into her head at the moment. However, it made small difference, since the speech and the manner were both kind, and kindness was the first thing needed.

Mrs. Clarkson looked at her with a mixed expression of gratitude and eagerness.

"It's not for me, miss," she said earnestly, "but for the poor little ones. I used to be a good one to work, but, you see, I can't work for 'em now—not at present."

And tears of extreme weakness filled her eyes.

Lucia laid her hand softly on the thin fingers that lay nervously catching at the edge of the sheet.

"Don't be the least afraid about them," she answered. "Mamma and the doctor will see that they are taken care of; only we thought you would be glad to know that people were thinking about them. There is another visitor here who can do you more good than I can—Mrs. Morton."

Lucia moved aside, and Bella took her place. Mrs. Clarkson looked up anxiously, with her whole desire written on her pale face, and was answered at once,

"You must make haste and get well," Bella said with a smile. "As soon as you are able, I want to talk to you about business. You will have to manage all the improvements I am going to make."

"Me? But you don't mean to let us stay?"

"Indeed I do."

The poor woman tried to cover her eyes with her thin hand, but had not strength. She whispered, "Thank God," as the heavy drops rolled from under her quivering eyelids.

"I am going away directly," Bella said, "because you ought to rest; but I want you to understand first, that I have not the least intention of disturbing you in your house. We have both paid dearly enough for our connection. It shall rest now without any further dispute. I will come again and see you. About money, it will be quite time enough to think when you are better. Try to keep free from anxiety for these little ones' sakes."

She was still holding the baby, soothing it with a gentle rocking motion; and so she moved round again from the bedside and stood by the stove. The child seemed to be asleep, and, reluctant to disturb it, she still delayed giving it up, though it was time to go away. The nurse had lingered for a moment tending the mother; then she came and stood ready to take the child. Both were looking down on the pale little face, when they saw it suddenly change. All at once the eyes opened wide, the muscles were drawn and contracted, a line of foam started out between the lips. One violent convulsion passed over the limbs, then they fell loose and nerveless; the eyes closed, the lips parted—the life, scarcely

twenty-four hours old, had passed away.

So sudden, so strange was the event—the almost instantaneous gliding from life to death—that Bella had not altered her position, or loosened her clasp when the final change, so awful and yet so beautiful, settled down upon the baby's face. Then she put it into the nurse's arms, and they looked at one another. They dared not speak, for the mother would have heard them, and their consultation how to tell her must needs be a speechless one; but what consultation could have altered the fact, or softened the awe and terror with which they bent over that little lifeless form? Lucia came from the low chair where the two elder children sat together, and where she had been talking softly to them; she came to Bella's side, and saw the truth. It was but by a gesture that her cry of horror could be repressed, but it was repressed, and for a minute the three paused irresolute and tearful, wondering what to do?

Then the nurse said softly,

"She's got to know it, poor soul! It's best tell her at once," and stepped to the bedside.

But there was no need to tell anything. With that strange quick intuition which so often saves the actual speaking of such tidings, the mother seemed to see what had happened.

"He's gone?" she said, with a weak quivering voice. "My baby!" And her eyes seemed to devour the still little form which she had not strength to put out her hand to touch. The kind woman laid down the child for a moment where the mother's lips could touch its cold cheek.

"Don't fret," she said, while tears rolled down her own face; "there's three on 'em yet, as wants their mother to take care on 'em."

She seemed to have touched with instinctive skill the right chord for consolation. Mrs. Clarkson spoke again after a minute with a steadier and calmer voice,

"You'll lay him by me now?" she said. "It can't wake him out of his sleep, and I'd like to see him till the last. Is Mrs. Morton there still?"

Bella came to her.

"Did you see him go?" she asked. "I was very thankful to you before, but I am more now, because you came just in time. Don't you think the little ones that

never spoke in this world will be able to speak up there?"

"Yes, I think so," Bella answered, fancying that her mind began to wander.

"And so you see my man is sure to ask what we were all doing, and the little one would be able to tell him how good you'd been to us."

She stopped; tears flowed softly, but she was too weak for violent grief; and so the two girls left her, after having given the nurse money for present use, and learned what comforts were most needed.

On their return they did not stop at all in Cacouna, but drove straight to the Cottage. Mrs. Bellairs was still there, and sent word to her sister by Margery to dismiss the sleigh and come in, that they might return home together. They found the two ladies sitting "conferring by the parlour fire," and eager to hear the result of their visit to Beaver Creek. Lucia saw that the narration must come from her; for Bella, worn out by the painful excitement of the morning, was incapable of describing what had so greatly moved her, and could scarcely bear even to hear the baby's death spoken of as a thing not to be regretted.

"Poor little creature!" Mrs. Bellairs said. "Even the mother by-and-by may be glad it is gone."

"Elise!" Bella cried impatiently, "how can you be so cruel? And you are a mother yourself!"

"You forget, dear, what a fate those children have; and yet, since you feel so pitifully towards them, it certainly does not become me to be less charitable;" and the kind-hearted woman wiped furtively the tears of genuine compassion which she had been shedding over the sorrows of the Clarksons, and never thought of defending herself from her sister's blame; though, to tell the truth, she had not in her whole nature a single spark of cruelty or uncharitableness, and that Bella knew perfectly well.

Lucia went on to mention the things really needed by the squatter's family. Mrs. Costello turned to Bella,

"Do you really mean," she asked, "to keep them on the farm after this winter?"

"Yes. I certainly shall not allow them to be turned out as long as they like to stay. I am going to have the land cleared and put under cultivation. I suppose it will be necessary to have a kind of foreman or manager of some sort there; and it has

occurred to me that Mrs. Clarkson might take him as a lodger. But before that can be done, the house would have to be enlarged and several alterations made. I must consult William about it."

Both Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Bellairs were surprised to hear the young widow speaking with so much of her old spirit and decision. The fact was that the consciousness that there was something to be done for others had made Bella aware that, in spite of her aching heart, she was still able to do what duties remained to her; and without hesitation, or, indeed, any thought about the matter, she was prepared to take upon herself the management of her own affairs, and to change her brother-in-law's position from that of guardian, resumed since her widowhood, to that of adviser only. In the very depths of her misery she had passed her twenty-first birthday, so that now she would have had in any case the right of acting for herself. It was the very time to which, not many months ago, Mr. Bellairs had looked forward with some anxiety, and which he had thought so well provided for by her marriage; now, in the utter change which had come both to her circumstances and feelings, there was little reason why even the most careful guardian should feel any reluctance to resign his office. But since her widowhood she had so visibly shrunk from all mention of her property, and especially of that part of it which had been the cause of her husband's dispute with his murderer, that her friends naturally wondered now to hear her speak of the management of those very lands in a way which showed that the subject had actually occupied her thoughts.

"I promised Dr. Hardy," Mrs. Costello said, "that the care of providing for the children should be mine. Indeed, I feel bound to do something. I think until they are old enough to be of some use to their mother, it would be well to give her a little allowance for their schooling and clothes; but I shall be away. Will you manage this for me?"

It was so arranged. Mrs. Costello was to leave a certain sum in Mrs. Morton's hands, to be paid monthly to Mrs. Clarkson for the benefit of her children; and, this being settled, the little party had time to turn their thoughts to subjects of more personal interest. They would not meet again until the Costellos returned from Moose Island, which would probably not be for a week at least. The messenger who had carried to Mr. Strafford the news of Christian's death had returned, and brought a letter which only confirmed Mrs. Costello's plans—she and Lucia were to be, for as long a time as they could spare, the guests of their old friend, and Christian was to be laid in the burial ground where so many of his own people already slept.

At last the two sisters left the Cottage, and once more Mrs. Costello and Lucia remained alone in the familiar room. How much seemed to have happened since they were last alone here! and, through great suffering, how much good seemed to have been wrought! The little home seemed pleasanter than ever, and for a moment Mrs. Costello asked herself if it was really necessary that they should leave it? But clearly, if not *necessary*, it was best. It was best, probably, that Lucia and Maurice should not meet again, and certainly that Lucia should be placed within reach of her future guardians. But Mrs. Costello sighed over her plan.



CHAPTER XXII.

Mr. Bellairs came, according to his promise, and drove Mrs. Costello and Lucia to Fairfield, where they were to take the boat for Moose Island. It was a distance of about five miles; and as they glided along rapidly and smoothly, Lucia remembered with a sigh that this was probably the last sleigh drive of any length that she would have before leaving Canada. Perhaps it was not right, considering what the object of their present journey was, that she should be at liberty to have any such thoughts; it might have been more decorous if she had been absorbed by the grave and sombre ideas which the occasion demanded; but Lucia was at heart too frank and natural to try to force upon herself the affectation of a grief she did not feel. It had come into her heart, while Christian was slowly wearing out the last days of his unhappy life, to care for him as her father, to be deeply sorry for him, and to desire to comfort him; but now that his sufferings were over, she honestly thought that there was no further reason for grieving on his account. She was sad, however, for very simple and childish reasons; and this idea that it was her last sleigh drive actually brought tears into her eyes. Everything was so lovely! The road along which they passed lay like a broad white line between the dark woods and the river. The sun, setting over the opposite shore, brought out millions of sparkling points brighter than diamonds on the surface of the snow, and the gorgeous colours of the sky, deeper and more vivid even than in summer, filled her heart with an inexpressible and ever-changing delight. That wonderful union of spotless purity and glorious colour seemed almost supernatural—as if it needed but for men's eyes to be opened that they might see plainly the city of "pure gold like unto clear glass" which stood upon those many-hued foundations, and the forms with garments white as snow which might come down and walk unsullied over the white-robed earth. But to see all this loveliness for the last time! To enjoy for the last time this luxury of nestling down among the sleigh robes, and being carried silently and swiftly forward, with nothing to disturb the dreamy, fanciful mood of the moment! She was actually crying, letting large heavy tears drop quietly down upon her furs—crying with the first premonitory attack of homesickness—when the village came in sight, and she had to rouse herself and dry her eyes, lest her mother should turn round and see her.

By-and-by they turned down the road to the steamboat wharf, and found

themselves among a little group of people. The boats only stopped here when they were signalled to do so; but to-night there happened to be other passengers going, and Mr. Bellairs advised Mrs. Costello to remain in the sleigh till the 'Reindeer,' which was just in sight, should arrive. They sat still, accordingly, while he stood beside them talking; and when the boat had stopped at the landing, they went on board and straight down to the ladies' cabin. It was by this time growing dusk; in the low cabin, with its small windows, there was but a faint glimmer of daylight remaining, and as soon as the boat was again under way, the hanging lamps were lighted and people who had till then lingered on deck began to come down by twos and threes. Mrs. Costello and Lucia took possession of a sofa; their voyage was to end about ten o'clock, and for the few hours it would last they were disposed to keep quiet and avoid observation. It happened that the number of passengers was large, the last boat having been detained at some of the Lake ports, and the continuance of navigation at that time of year being so uncertain; and the greater part of the women on board having come from places much further west than Cacouna, formed a crowd of strangers, among whom two veiled and muffled figures easily passed unnoticed.

The cabin had grown very quiet, and the dull monotonous noise of the paddles had lulled Lucia almost to sleep, when she was startled by the touch of her mother's hand upon her arm.

"It is very nearly time we were there," Mrs. Costello said. "If it is a fine night we ought to be able to see the island."

They drew their cloaks closely round them and went up on deck. The night was brilliantly clear and starlight, though there was no moon, and already the lights of the small American town of Claremont, where they were to land, were in sight, with their bright reflection shining in the river below them. To the left a large dark mass seemed to lie upon the water, and to that Mrs. Costello's eyes turned.

"There is the island," she said in a low voice. "Your birthplace, Lucia, and my first Canadian home."

But in vain Lucia strained her eyes to distinguish the size or form of the land. The end of the island which they were approaching was still thickly wooded, and the drooping branches added still more vagueness to the outline. Only as they came nearer a small clearing was dimly distinguishable, where a kind of promontory ran out into the river, and on the point of land a small white house.

Mrs. Costello laid her hand upon Lucia's.

"Look!" she said, "can you see that space where the house stands? What a lonely place it looks! I wonder how I lived there for six years. I can see even the place where the canoe used to lie on the beach. There is one there now!" She stood straining her eyes to watch the scene once so familiar, until the steamer, drawing towards the landing-place, completely hid it from her. Then the lights on shore flashed out more brightly close at hand, and the figures of men waiting on the wharf could be distinguished. Just as the cable was thrown on shore a boat came flying across the river from the island. It drew up to the wharf, and next moment Mr. Strafford was seen coming through the little crowd to receive his visitors. They landed immediately, and he led them to his boat.

"You remember this crossing?" he said to Mrs. Costello; "it was by this way that you left the island."

"With my baby in my arms. Yes; I am not likely to forget it."

They took their places in the boat, where an Indian boy was waiting. Mr. Strafford took an oar, and they glided out of the light and noise of the shore into the starry darkness.

Very few words passed as they crossed the river. Mrs. Costello's mind was full of thoughts of her life here, and Lucia looked forward with wondering curiosity to the sight of an Indian settlement. She was conscious, too, that the feeling of terror and dislike, which for so many years of her life had been always awakened by the sight of one of her father's people, was not even now altogether extinguished. Since she had known her own origin she had tried to get rid of this prejudice more earnestly than before, but the habit was so strong that she had not yet quite mastered it. She sat and watched the shadowy outline of the Indian boy's figure in the boat, and lectured herself a little on the folly and even wickedness of her sensations.

They had to pass round the lower end of the island, where the village lay, in order to reach Mr. Strafford's house; but the lights were all extinguished, and the inhabitants already asleep. They coasted along, passing a little wooden pier, and some fishing-boats and canoes lying moored beside the beach, and at last came to a boarded landing-place with a small boat-house at one end. Here they stopped, and Mr. Strafford bidding his boy run up to the door and knock, assisted the strangers to land. They were scarcely out of the boat when a bright gleam of lamplight flashing from the open door showed them a sloping path, up which

they went, and found themselves in a bright warm room, all glowing with lamplight and firelight. A very neat little old woman in a Quaker-like cap and dress was ready to welcome them, and in front of the great blazing fire a table stood ready for supper. The old woman Mr. Strafford introduced as his housekeeper, Mrs. Hall, and Mrs. Costello recognized her as her own successor in the charge of that school for Indian women and girls of which she had told Lucia.

The room in which supper was laid, and into which the outer door opened, was large and square. At each end two smaller ones opened off it—on one side Mr. Strafford's study and bedroom, at the other Mrs. Hall's room and the one which had been prepared for the guests. Here also a fire burned brightly on the hearth, shining on the white walls and on the bed where, years ago, Mrs. Costello had watched her baby through its first illness. She sat down for a moment to recall that time, and to recognize bit by bit the familiar aspect of the place; then she made haste to lay aside her wrappings and get ready for supper.

It was quite ready by this time—the most luxurious meal Mrs. Hall's resources could provide. There was coffee—not to be praised in itself, but hot, and accompanied by an abundance of cream. There were venison steaks, and a great pile of buckwheat cakes that moment taken from the fire, with a glass dish of clear golden maple syrup placed beside them, and expressly intended for Lucia's benefit. Altogether not a meal to be despised.

When supper was over, and Mrs. Hall had left them, Mr. Strafford began to ask Mrs. Costello for particulars of the arrangements made for the removal of Christian's remains, and when they would probably arrive at the island.

Mr. Bellairs had had some difficulty, she told him, in finding means of transport, but the matter had been finally settled by his engaging a sailing-boat belonging to a fisherman. The coffin had been put on board early in the morning, and the boat started at once. It ought, therefore, to reach the island early to-morrow.

"All here is ready," Mr. Strafford said. "I suppose three o'clock in the afternoon will do to fix for the funeral; the boat is sure to be here long before that."

"Oh! yes, long before. Do the people know?"

"Yes, I suppose most of them do. There are not very many who remember you, but Mary Wanita will be here in the morning to see you. Shall you dislike it?"

"On the contrary, I shall be very glad. Mary was a true friend."

They talked a little longer, sitting round the fire, when the great logs began to break through in the middle and fall down on the hearth outside the andirons, sending up clouds of sparks as they were put back into the fire. The night was very still; and in the pauses of their talk they could hear the mournful wash of the river as its steady current pressed against the landing-place below. To the two elder people, who said nothing to each other of their fancy, another presence, shadowy and silent, seemed to take its place among them at the fireside—a fair, serene presence, matronly and gracious, which had passed away from human eyes years ago. And they paused and thought of her as she had been that winter night when she took the fugitive mother and child into her kindly home, and gave them all her womanly pity and help. What lonely years had passed here since then!

By some instinctive sympathy their eyes met, and each knew what the other's thoughts had been. Mr. Strafford rose.

"To-morrow," he said, "we shall have time for a long chat; to-night you must be tired. I hope Mrs. Hall has done what she could to make you comfortable."

There could be no doubt about that. For two or three days nothing had occupied the good woman's thoughts but this strange and wonderful arrival of strangers—of ladies, too—at the house where so few strangers ever came; and she had exerted all her backwoods' ingenuity to repair what deficiency of comfort there might be.

They were in no humour either to be critical; and Lucia was soon asleep, while her mother lay listening to the sound of the river, and thinking of the many things which this very room brought so freshly to her mind.



CHAPTER XXIII.

It was late when Mrs. Costello fell asleep, and very early when she woke, startled out of her dreams by a long wailing sound. She listened, and in the dark winter morning could hear the wind sweeping through the pines and round the house with loud intermittent gusts, like moans and outcries of pain. The moments of silence between these gusts had something weird and awful, and she could not resist the desire to get up and look out at the weather. But just as she drew aside the blind, a cloud of frozen snow was dashed against the glass, rattling sharply, while the wind again passed on with its ominous wail. Nothing whatever could be seen; the pale dim dawn was veiled by mist and snow, and each time the icy particles were driven against the window, they left behind them a thicker curtain of frost. Mrs. Costello went shivering back to bed, but she did not sleep again. She began to consider anxiously how far the boat that was carrying her dead could have come before the storm commenced. At midnight it had been quite calm, probably indeed till four or five o'clock; and if the sailors had foreseen the change, they would most likely have made all possible speed. If they did so, the wind and current both being in their favour, they ought to be here now; but if, as was quite equally likely, they had stopped last night at some port, would they venture out in this storm?

She began to regret that she had not caused the body to be sent by land, so as to have only to cross the narrow current which divided the island from the Canadian shore. She had decided against this plan on account of the greater distance and the difficulty of transport, but now these seemed less formidable than the uncertainty and possible danger of the route she had chosen.

She was glad when Lucia awoke, and she could speak of her uneasiness. By this time the wind had grown more violent, and blew continuously, and the rattling of snow like frozen dust against the window seemed never to cease. A dim daylight had begun to creep into the room, but it was even colder and more cheerless than the darkness. Presently a young Indian girl, whom Mrs. Hall had trained for service, came softly into the room and began to coax the still burning embers of the fire into a blaze. She went about her work with a silent deftness which would have done credit to the best of housemaids, and yet in all her motions there was something of that free natural grace which belongs to her people. When she had done, and was standing for a moment to see if the fire 'drew' properly, Mrs.

Costello spoke to her. She understood no English, however, or at least she understood none addressed to her by a strange voice, and said so in her own soft musical language. When the question was repeated in Ojibway, however, her face brightened, and she was perfectly ready to answer all Mrs. Costello chose to ask.

She said the weather had only changed towards six o'clock. No boat, however, had arrived, but it might be on the other side of the island, where the passage was broader and safer than on this, the Canadian side.

As soon as she was gone the two women, anxious and uneasy, rose and dressed that they might be ready. Ready for what they scarcely knew; but they had the feeling common enough when nothing can possibly be done, that it would be a comfort to be prepared to do something.

They found Mrs. Hall superintending the laying of the breakfast-table, and Mr. Strafford hearing their voices came out of his study and joined them. He had not the least inclination to sympathise with the fears in which Mrs. Costello was a little disposed to indulge, with regard to the safety of the boat; but he confessed a doubt as to its arrival before the hour named, or indeed that day at all. This uncertainty threw a shadow over the whole party. It was impossible to avoid making pauses in their conversation whenever the wind seemed either to rise more fiercely, or to be lulled into a momentary calm; and after breakfast was over, and Mrs. Hall in cloak and hood had started for her school, they began to make frequent journeys to the windows, and interrupt their talk to say to each other,

"There is less drift, I think."

"Yes; certainly it is clearer. I can see the water." Or,

"The wind is surely higher than ever, and it will be against them."

"On the contrary, it is almost directly favourable, but the question is whether they would venture out at all in such a storm."

At last, however, towards twelve o'clock the wind did unmistakably begin to abate. Mr. Strafford had been out, and on his return affirmed that the storm was almost over. It might return again towards night, but if the boatmen knew their business, they should be able to take advantage of the next few hours and reach the island while the calm lasted.

"There is no sign of their arrival at present then?" Mrs. Costello asked anxiously.

"I have not been round the island," Mr. Strafford answered. "No one seems to have seen anything of a boat at all. However, they would need to be close in shore to be distinguishable through the drift."

"But it seems that there is very little chance of their being here by three o'clock. Would not it be better to decide that in any case the funeral will not be till tomorrow?"

"I think it would. I intend going by-and-by up the island, and will take care to arrange that first, and also about the reception of the boat when it does arrive."

Mrs. Costello looked up anxiously.

"Are you going quite to the other end of the island?" she asked.

"Yes; to your old house. The woman who lives there is very ill, and, you know, I am doctor and parson both in one."

"Will you take me with you?"

"You! Impossible! You would be frozen to death."

"It would not hurt me; and I confess I have so little control of myself to-day that sitting here quietly by the fire is just the hardest thing I could have to do."

Mr. Strafford examined her face, and perceived that she had really grown painfully nervous and excited. He turned to Lucia.

"What do you think?" he asked. "Ought I to say yes or no?"

"Say yes, please, and let me go too."

"But, my dear friends, what good can you possibly do? If the drift and mist clear away, you may be able to see a little way up the river, but your doing so will not bring the boat one bit faster."

"That is true; but it may end our uncertainty a little sooner."

"I doubt even that. One cannot calculate on having more than an hour or two of clear daylight between the subsiding of the storm and sunset; and even if it were possible for you to stand watching all that time, I do not believe the boat would come while there was daylight enough to see it."

"Who is the sick woman? Did I ever know her?"

"No; she came to the island after you left."

"Don't you think she would let us sit for a while in her outer room? It has a window looking right up the river, and she, I suppose, is in the inner one, so that we need not disturb her."

"You seem to have decided," Mr. Strafford said, smiling, "so I give up. Yes, poor Martha has not been out of the inner room for weeks, and you can sit by the window you speak of as long as you please. I am sure you will be welcome; only, remember I do not approve of your going at all."

However, they remained obstinate. As soon as dinner was over they wrapped themselves warmly, and started with Mr. Strafford for the house on the promontory. Mrs. Costello felt her heart beat faster and faster as they followed the well-remembered paths, which, now that a veil of snow covered all the improvements made under Mr. Strafford's teaching, seemed quite unchanged since she traversed them last. She recalled the sensations of that night, the bitter cold, and clear starlight round her, and the tumult of fear, anger, and hope within. To-day what a difference! Then she was flying from her husband's tyranny, now she was going to meet his corpse, and to receive it with tenderness and honour. Her heart was too full for her to speak. Her companions guessed it, and left her in peace.

Mr. Strafford had a thousand things to explain and describe to Lucia. The island was his kingdom; its prosperity his own work; and it was one of his greatest pleasures to find a stranger who was interested in all he could tell him. This young girl, too, whom he had known from her birth, whom he had seen so many times in his wife's arms, who had been the baby-playfellow of his daughter, had a claim, stronger than she herself could understand, on the solitary and childless man. He would have liked to keep her with him always, and see her devote her life, as he had devoted his, to the cause of her father's people. Her frank and yet modest manner, joined to what he knew of her conduct lately, pleased and satisfied him. He took a certain speculative delight in examining her character, and deciding that, after all, the union of the Indian and Anglo-Saxon races would be favourable to both. Talking, therefore, in the most friendly humour with each other, they pursued their way through the loose and uneven snow, sometimes stumbling into a deep drift, sometimes crossing a space swept almost bare by the wind. Mrs. Costello leaned on her old friend's arm. Scarcely half the distance

was passed when she began to be conscious of a feeling of exhaustion from cold and fatigue, but her determination to go on sustained her; she kept her veil closely over her face that the others might not see her paleness, and exerted all her energies to overcome her fatigue. At length they approached the shore. The sky had lightened considerably, and they could see some distance up the river. Both sky and water were of a leaden dulness; only the effects of the morning storm could be seen in the great waves, tipped with foam, which still rolled sullenly upon the beach. But there was no sail in sight. A small canoe, which was labouring to make its way from the island to the American shore, was the only speck upon the broad, swift-flowing stream; and the party, after pausing for a moment to make quite certain that it was so, turned towards the house on the point, where they meant to keep their watch.

They had been seen from within; and as they came to the gate of the small enclosure in front, a little girl opened the door to admit them. They passed immediately into the room where, on the evening of her flight, Mrs. Costello had found Christian and his companions. Its aspect was very little changed. The house and furniture, such as it was, had been sold years ago to its present occupants; Mr. Strafford had rescued such small articles as the fugitive wife's desk, workbox, and various trifles which had been in her possession before her marriage, but other things remained just as they had been. Two children, girls of ten and twelve, were the only occupants of the room, and they cast curious glances at the two ladies who followed the clergyman into their domains.

He spoke to them in Ojibway, asking first for their mother, and then why the younger sister was not at school?

"It was so stormy this morning," the elder answered. "She is going this afternoon."

"It is quite time she was gone, then. These ladies will stay with you, Sunflower, while I go in to see your mother. Tell her I am here."

"Sunflower"—always thus called instead of by her baptismal name of Julia—obeyed; and while she was away, Mr. Strafford placed a chair for Mrs. Costello in front of a window which commanded the long reach of the river towards Cacouna. She sat down, and commenced her watch, which a glance at the American clock hanging on the wall told her would not be a very long one.

The younger girl had wrapped herself in a great shawl, and hurried off to school; the elder one was occupied at the further end of the room, making bread of

Indian meal, and baking it in thin cakes upon the stove. Mr. Strafford was with the invalid, and the mother and daughter sat silently at the window and watched. The afternoon advanced. The American clock struck one quarter after another. It was already half-past four. Mr. Strafford came back; but, seeing the absorbed attitude of Mrs. Costello, he would not disturb her, and the silence continued. At last she moved. She had been looking, with intense eagerness, at one point far away in the distance. She turned round to Mr. Strafford.

"Look!" she said; "*it is a sail.*"

He rose, and looked as she pointed.

"I see nothing," he answered.

"Lucia!" she said impatiently, "can't you see it?"

But Lucia shook her head. She had fancied several times already that she saw something.

Mrs. Costello said no more just then. A minute or two afterwards, however, she spoke still more positively.

"It is a boat with two sails. It is coming down quickly now. They must have waited for the storm to be over."

Next moment the others saw something faintly marked against the horizon. It *was* a sail.

But Mrs. Costello either was gifted with longer sight, or her excitement sharpened her faculties. She declared that it was certainly the expected boat; it was one, she knew well, and could recognize distinctly.

They began to speculate as to the time of its arrival; and while they spoke, still watching eagerly, they did not notice how the sky darkened. The horizon still remained light; it even grew brighter; but the brightness was only a line, surrounded with a silvery border; the black cloud spread out overhead. By-and-by the wind began to rise again in long, wailing blasts, as it had done that morning. The edges of the cloud seemed to be torn into long, jagged fringes, and there fell sharp, momentary showers of snow and sleet, hissing as they touched the water. The boat came on fast now; but at intervals it was hidden; once, when a denser obstacle than usual of rain and drift and frosty mist had come between it and the land, there appeared in the lull that followed another object much further

away, but moving down the river also. It was a large steamer coming down from the lakes, and hurrying on before the storm.

Again the distance was hidden. Again, after a longer interval, the two boats were seen—the small one tacking from side to side, using every contrivance to hasten its course, and reach the port; the other holding steadily and swiftly on its way.

But as the wind increased there came with it a dense fog. Gradually it settled down over the river and then the wind sank, blowing only, as at first, in single gusts, which wailed horribly round the house and through the trees about it. There was nothing to see now, but still the three kept their places at the window, and hoped the fog might rise if but for a moment, and show them where the boat was.

Sometimes, indeed, the fog did vary in intensity. A current of wind seemed to sweep through it, and then they could distinguish the lights which the steamer was now burning at the mast head, and guess how far distant that still was. But these lights seemed at last to be almost close at hand; and the boat, which had been at first so much before the steamer, ought to be quite near also. It might be even now passing the place where they were, on its way to the village at the further end of the island.

Mr. Strafford reminded Mrs. Costello of this, and proposed that they should start on their return.

"If we delay much longer," he said, "it will be quite dark, and besides, the paths are getting every moment more choked up."

She rose instantly.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "I ought to have thought;" but still, as she fastened her cloak, she continued to keep her eyes fixed upon the veil of fog which hung between her and the river.

Mr. Strafford and Lucia both stopped to say a few words to Sunflower, who was still busy with her cakes, but Mrs. Costello never ceased to look out until she was obliged to follow the others from the house. The air was bitterly cold; and, hastened by storm and mist, the night was coming on fast. They paused for a moment outside the wicket; and Mrs. Costello, looking at Mr. Strafford with a consciousness that her wish was foolish and unreasonable, said—

"I should like to go down quite to the shore, just for a moment, to try if I can see

anything."

He turned instantly and walked with her to the very extremity of the little point, Lucia following.

They stood exactly on the spot where she had landed as a bride, and looked out into the darkness. Suddenly she grasped Mr. Strafford's arm.

"Listen!" she said, "there are oars close by."

"Impossible," he answered. "See, the steamer's lights are just there opposite us. It must be turning round to go into Claremont."

But she bent her head forward listening. For even through the beat of the paddles, which she could now distinguish plainly, it still seemed that she heard the sound of oars, and she thought,

"They have given up trying to use their sails, and taken to rowing."

Suddenly a current of wind passing along the surface of the water lifted the fog. Just to their right, towering high in the air and holding a swift, steady course, came the steamer; but in front of it, scarcely a dozen yards from its huge bulk, lay the little boat. In that moment, as the fog rose and showed the danger, a single cry of terror burst from the boatmen and from those on shore. Instantly afterwards a shout was heard on board the steamer, and the engines were reversed; but the space was awfully small, and the monster, carried by the strong current, bore on still. Lucia hid her face; Mrs. Costello, still leaning forward, tightened her grasp on the arm that supported her. Mr. Strafford unconsciously spoke aloud,

"In the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, Good Lord deliver us."

And as he spoke the crash came. Next moment the boat had disappeared, and the steamer still swept on.

Neither of the three on shore saw more than this. At the moment when the boat was struck and sunk, Mr. Strafford felt Mrs. Costello's clasp loosen on his arm. He turned just in time to save her from falling, and carried her back into the house in one of those fainting fits which so much alarmed Lucia. It did not, however, last long; and when she had a little recovered, he left her and went out again.

The fog had once more settled down, but he could distinguish the many lights which now gleamed from the deck and from the windows of the steamer which still lay where it had been stopped. Voices were audible, too, and he contrived to make out that boats had been let down to search for the fisherman and his companions. This was all that could be learned here, and he became anxious to reach home, that he might himself cross to Claremont and learn what was known there.

He went back to the house, therefore, and found Mrs. Costello quite determined, in spite of her weakness, to start at once on their walk back. With painful forebodings and regrets, therefore, they left the promontory, and walked as fast as they were able towards the village.

Little was said on the way; but as soon as they were near his house, Mr. Strafford told his companions of his intention. Neither could find anything to say against it; but Mrs. Costello looked anxiously at him while he explained that he meant to take a good boatman with him and burn a bright light. Then she held out her hand to him to express the thanks she had no words for.

They found Mrs. Hall unhappy at their absence, and ready to do everything possible for their comfort; but it was not until she had seen Mr. Strafford push off from the landing-place that Mrs. Costello could be induced to lie down and rest.

Then there was nothing more to be done, and she submitted readily; and so great was her exhaustion that she almost instantly fell asleep. Lucia and Mrs. Hall sat watching her, and two hours passed before she woke.

At last, she moved, and Lucia was glad to see that her face was less pale than when she lay down, and that she looked up at her with a smile.

"Is Mr. Strafford come back?" she said. "He will bring us good news, I think."

"He has not come yet," Lucia said; but almost as she spoke, footsteps were heard outside. Mrs. Hall hurried to open the door, and Mr. Strafford came in.

"They are safe?" Mrs. Costello asked.

"Yes; all three. There was the man and two boys—one of them his son. The steamer's boat picked up the boys almost immediately. The man's arm is broken; and he was carried a little way down the stream before they found him."

"Are they at Claremont?"

"Yes. They will go back home by the steamer to-morrow, and you will hear more of them when you return to Cacouna."

"And the boat?"

"No one knows anything of that. In the darkness and confusion it must have floated away with the current."

There was another question to ask, but she stopped, scarcely knowing how to ask it. Mr. Strafford understood her silence.

"The man told me," he said, "that the coffin was on deck, and that when the steamer struck them the boat capsized. He himself clung to the side for a moment when it was upside down in the water, so that everything on board, which was not secured, must have gone to the bottom."

So it was. Standing beside the home of her married life, she had witnessed her husband's burial. After his stormy life he was not to rest in quiet consecrated ground; but to lie where the current of his native river washed over him continually and kept him in perpetual oblivion. It was better so. No angry feelings had followed him to his death; but having been freely forgiven, it was well that he should leave no memorial behind him—not even a grave—but pass away and be forgotten. When all was over, Mrs. Costello felt this. For Lucia's sake, it was well—let the dead go now, and make way for the living.

END OF VOL. II.

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