

THE SEVENTH SCENE - ST. CRUX-IN-THE-MARSH.

CHAPTER I.

"THIS is where you are to sleep. Put yourself tidy, and then come down again to my room. The admiral has returned, and you will have to begin by waiting on him at dinner to-day."

With those words, Mrs. Drake, the housekeeper, closed the door; and the new parlor-maid was left alone in her bed-chamber at St. Crux.

That day was the eventful twenty-fifth of February. In barely four months from the time when Mrs. Lecount had placed her master's private Instructions in his Executor's hands, the one combination of circumstances against which it had been her first and foremost object to provide was exactly the combination which had now taken place. Mr. Noel Vanstone's widow and Admiral Bartram's Secret Trust were together in the same house.

Thus far, events had declared themselves without an exception in Magdalen's favor. Thus far, the path which had led her to St. Crux had been a path without an obstacle: Louisa, whose name she had now taken, had sailed three days since for Australia, with her husband and her child; she was the only living creature whom Magdalen had trusted with her secret, and she was by this time out of sight of the English land. The girl had been careful, reliable and faithfully devoted to her mistress's interests to the last. She had passed the ordeal of her interview with the housekeeper, and had forgotten none of the instructions by which she had been prepared to meet it. She had herself proposed to turn the six weeks' delay, caused by the death in the admiral's family, to good account, by continuing the all-important practice of those domestic lessons, on the perfect acquirement of which her mistress's daring stratagem depended for its success. Thanks to the time thus gained, when Louisa's marriage was over, and the day of parting had come, Magdalen had learned and mastered, in the nicest detail, everything that her former servant could teach her. On the day when she passed the doors of St. Crux she entered on her desperate venture, strong in the ready presence of mind under emergencies which her later life had taught her, stronger still in the trained capacity that she possessed for the assumption of a character not her own, strongest of all in her two months' daily familiarity with the practical duties of the position which she had

undertaken to fill.

As soon as Mrs. Drake's departure had left her alone, she unpacked her box, and dressed herself for the evening.

She put on a lavender-colored stuff-gown--half-mourning for Mrs. Girdlestone; ordered for all the servants, under the admiral's instructions--a white muslin apron, and a neat white cap and collar, with ribbons to match the gown. In this servant's costume--in the plain gown fastening high round her neck, in the neat little white cap at the back of her head--in this simple dress, to the eyes of all men, not linen-drapers, at once the most modest and the most alluring that a woman can wear, the sad changes which mental suffering had wrought in her beauty almost disappeared from view. In the evening costume of a lady, with her bosom uncovered, with her figure armed, rather than dressed, in unpliant silk, the admiral might have passed her by without notice in his own drawing-room. In the evening costume of a servant, no admirer of beauty could have looked at her once and not have turned again to look at her for the second time.

Descending the stairs, on her way to the house-keeper's room, she passed by the entrances to two long stone corridors, with rows of doors opening on them; one corridor situated on the second, and one on the first floor of the house. "Many rooms!" she thought, as she looked at the doors. "Weary work searching here for what I have come to find!"

On reaching the ground-floor she was met by a weather-beaten old man, who stopped and stared at her with an appearance of great interest. He was the same old man whom Captain Wragge had seen in the backyard at St. Crux, at work on the model of a ship. All round the neighborhood he was known, far and wide, as "the admiral's coxswain." His name was Mazey. Sixty years had written their story of hard work at sea, and hard drinking on shore, on the veteran's grim and wrinkled face. Sixty years had proved his fidelity, and had brought his battered old carcass, at the end of the voyage, into port in his master's house.

Seeing no one else of whom she could inquire, Magdalen requested the old man to show her the way that led to the housekeeper's room.

"I'll show you, my dear," said old Mazey, speaking in the high and hollow voice peculiar to the deaf. "You're the new maid--eh? And a fine-grown girl, too! His honor, the admiral, likes a parlor-maid with a clean run fore and aft. You'll do, my dear--you'll do."

"You must not mind what Mr. Mazey says to you," remarked the housekeeper, opening her door as the old sailor expressed his approval of Magdalen in these terms. "He is privileged to talk as he pleases; and he is very tiresome and slovenly in his habits; but he means no harm."

With that apology for the veteran, Mrs. Drake led Magdalen first to the pantry, and next to the linen-room, installing her, with all due formality, in her own domestic dominions. This ceremony completed, the new parlor-maid was taken upstairs, and was shown the dining-room, which opened out of the corridor on the first floor. Here she was directed to lay the cloth, and to prepare the table for one person only--Mr. George Bartram not having returned with his uncle to St. Crux. Mrs. Drake's sharp eyes watched Magdalen attentively as she performed this introductory duty; and Mrs. Drake's private convictions, when the table was spread, forced her to acknowledge, so far, that the new servant thoroughly understood her work.

An hour later the soup-tureen was placed on the table; and Magdalen stood alone behind the admiral's empty chair, waiting her master's first inspection of her when he entered the dining-room.

A large bell rang in the lower regions--quick, shambling footsteps pattered on the stone corridor outside--the door opened suddenly--and a tall lean yellow old man, sharp as to his eyes, shrewd as to his lips, fussily restless as to all his movements, entered the room, with two huge Labrador dogs at his heels, and took his seat in a violent hurry. The dogs followed him, and placed themselves, with the utmost gravity and composure, one on each side of his chair. This was Admiral Bartram, and these were the companions of his solitary meal.

"Ay! ay! ay! here's the new parlor-maid, to be sure!" he began, looking sharply, but not at all unkindly, at Magdalen. "What's your name, my good girl? Louisa, is it? I shall call you Lucy, if you don't mind. Take off the cover, my dear--I'm a minute or two late to-day. Don't be unpunctual to-morrow on that account; I am as regular as clock-work generally. How are you after your journey? Did my spring-cart bump you about much in bringing you from the station? Capital soup this--hot as fire--reminds me of the soup we used to have in the West Indies in the year Three. Have you got your half-mourning on? Stand there, and let me see. Ah, yes, very neat, and nice, and tidy. Poor Mrs. Girdlestone! Oh dear, dear, dear, poor Mrs. Girdlestone! You're not afraid of dogs, are you, Lucy? Eh? What? You like dogs? That's right! Always be kind to dumb animals. These two dogs dine with me every day, except when there's company. The dog with the black nose is Brutus, and the dog with the white nose is Cassius. Did you ever hear who Brutus

and Cassius were? Ancient Romans? That's right---good girl. Mind your book and your needle, and we'll get you a good husband one of these days. Take away the soup, my dear, take away the soup!"

This was the man whose secret it was now the one interest of Magdalen's life to surprise! This was the man whose name had supplanted hers in Noel Vanstone's will!

The fish and the roast meat followed; and the admiral's talk rambled on--now in soliloquy, now addressed to the parlor-maid, and now directed to the dogs--as familiarly and as discontentedly as ever. Magdalen observed with some surprise that the companions of the admiral's dinner had, thus far, received no scraps from their master's plate. The two magnificent brutes sat squatted on their haunches, with their great heads over the table, watching the progress of the meal, with the profoundest attention, but apparently expecting no share in it. The roast meat was removed, the admiral's plate was changed, and Magdalen took the silver covers off the two made-dishes on either side of the table. As she handed the first of the savory dishes to her master, the dogs suddenly exhibited a breathless personal interest in the proceedings. Brutus gluttonously watered at the mouth; and the tongue of Cassius, protruding in unutterable expectation, smoked again between his enormous jaws.

The admiral helped himself liberally from the dish; sent Magdalen to the side-table to get him some bread; and, when he thought her eye was off him, furtively tumbled the whole contents of his plate into Brutus's mouth. Cassius whined faintly as his fortunate comrade swallowed the savory mess at a gulp. "Hush! you fool," whispered the admiral. "Your turn next!"

Magdalen presented the second dish. Once more the old gentleman helped himself largely--once more he sent her away to the side-table--once more he tumbled the entire contents of the plate down the dog's throat, selecting Cassius this time, as became a considerate master and an impartial man. When the next course followed--consisting of a plain pudding and an unwholesome "cream"--Magdalen's suspicion of the function of the dogs at the dinner-table was confirmed. While the master took the simple pudding, the dogs swallowed the elaborate cream. The admiral was plainly afraid of offending his cook on the one hand, and of offending his digestion on the other--and Brutus and Cassius were the two trained accomplices who regularly helped him every day off the horns of his dilemma. "Very good! very good!" said the old gentleman, with the most transparent duplicity. "Tell the cook, my dear, a capital cream!"

Having placed the wine and dessert on the table, Magdalen was about to withdraw. Before she could leave the room, her master called her back.

"Stop, stop!" said the admiral; "you don't know the ways of the house yet, Lucy. Put another wine-glass here, at my right hand--the largest you can find, my dear. I've got a third dog, who comes in at dessert--a drunken old sea-dog who has followed my fortunes, afloat and ashore, for fifty years and more. Yes, yes, that's the sort of glass we want. You're a good girl--you're a neat, handy girl. Steady, my dear! there's nothing to be frightened at!"

A sudden thump on the outside of the door, followed by one mighty bark from each of the dogs, had made Magdalen start. "Come in!" shouted the admiral. The door opened; the tails of Brutus and Cassius cheerfully thumped the floor; and old Mazey marched straight up to the right-hand side of his master's chair. The veteran stood there, with his legs wide apart and his balance carefully adjusted, as if the dining-room had been a cabin, and the house a ship pitching in a sea-way.

The admiral filled the large glass with port, filled his own glass with claret, and raised it to his lips.

"God bless the Queen, Mazey," said the admiral.

"God bless the Queen, your honor," said old Mazey, swallowing his port, as the dogs swallowed the made-dishes, at a gulp.

"How's the wind, Mazey?"

"West and by Noathe, your honor."

"Any report to-night, Mazey!"

"No report, your honor."

"Good-evening, Mazey."

"Good-evening, your honor."

The after-dinner ceremony thus completed, old Mazey made his bow, and walked out of the room again. Brutus and Cassius stretched themselves on the rug to digest mushrooms and made gravies in the lubricating heat of the fire. "For what we have received, the Lord make us truly thankful," said the admiral. "Go downstairs, my good girl, and get your supper. A light meal,

Lucy, if you take my advice--a light meal, or you will have the nightmare. Early to bed, my dear, and early to rise, makes a parlor-maid healthy and wealthy and wise. That's the wisdom of your ancestors--you mustn't laugh at it. Good-night." In those words Magdalen was dismissed; and so her first day's experience of Admiral Bartram came to an end.

After breakfast the next morning, the admiral's directions to the new parlor-maid included among them one particular order which, in Magdalen's situation, it was especially her interest to receive. In the old gentleman's absence from home that day, on local business which took him to Ossory, she was directed to make herself acquainted with the whole inhabited quarter of the house, and to learn the positions of the various rooms, so as to know where the bells called her when the bells rang. Mrs. Drake was charged with the duty of superintending the voyage of domestic discovery, unless she happened to be otherwise engaged--in which case any one of the inferior servants would be equally competent to act as Magdalen's guide.

At noon the admiral left for Ossory, and Magdalen presented herself in Mrs. Drake's room, to be shown over the house. Mrs. Drake happened to be otherwise engaged, and referred her to the head house-maid. The head house-maid happened on that particular morning to be in the same condition as Mrs. Drake, and referred her to the under-house-maids. The under-house-maids declared they were all behindhand and had not a minute to spare--they suggested, not too civilly, that old Mazey had nothing on earth to do, and that he knew the house as well, or better, than he knew his A B C. Magdalen took the hint, with a secret indignation and contempt which it cost her a hard struggle to conceal. She had suspected, on the previous night, and she was certain now, that the women-servants all incomprehensibly resented her presence among them with the same sullen unanimity of distrust. Mrs. Drake, as she had seen for herself, was really engaged that morning over her accounts. But of all the servants under her who had made their excuses not one had even affected to be more occupied than usual. Their looks said plainly, "We don't like you; and we won't show you over the house."

She found her way to old Mazey, not by the scanty directions given her, but by the sound of the veteran's cracked and quavering voice, singing in some distant seclusion a verse of the immortal sea-song--"Tom Bowling." Just as she stopped among the rambling stone passages on the basement story of the house, uncertain which way to turn next, she heard the tuneless old voice in the distance, singing these lines:

"His form was of the manliest beau-u-u-uty, His heart was ki-i-ind

and soft; Faithful below Tom did his duty, But now he's gone alo-o-o-o-oft --But now he's go-o-o-one aloft!"

Magdalen followed in the direction of the quavering voice, and found herself in a little room looking out on the back yard. There sat old Mazey, with his spectacles low on his nose, and his knotty old hands blundering over the rigging of his model ship. There were Brutus and Cassius digesting before the fire again, and snoring as if they thoroughly enjoyed it. There was Lord Nelson on one wall, in flaming watercolors; and there, on the other, was a portrait of Admiral Bartram's last flagship, in full sail on a sea of slate, with a salmon-colored sky to complete the illusion.

"What, they won't show you over the house--won't they?" said old Mazey. "I will, then! That head house-maid's a sour one, my dear--if ever there was a sour one yet. You're too young and good-looking to please 'em--that's what you are." He rose, took off his spectacles, and feebly mended the fire. "She's as straight as a poplar," said old Mazey, considering Magdalen's figure in drowsy soliloquy. "I say she's as straight as a poplar, and his honor the admiral says so too! Come along, my dear," he proceeded, addressing himself to Magdalen again. "I'll teach you your Pints of the Compass first. When you know your Pints, blow high, blow low, you'll find it plain sailing all over the house."

He led the way to the door--stopped, and suddenly bethinking himself of his miniature ship, went back to put his model away in an empty cupboard--led the way to the door again--stopped once more--remembered that some of the rooms were chilly--and pottered about, swearing and grumbling, and looking for his hat. Magdalen sat down patiently to wait for him. She gratefully contrasted his treatment of her with the treatment she had received from the women. Resist it as firmly, despise it as proudly as we may, all studied unkindness--no matter how contemptible it may be--has a stinging power in it which reaches to the quick. Magdalen only knew how she had felt the small malice of the female servants, by the effect which the rough kindness of the old sailor produced on her afterward. The dumb welcome of the dogs, when the movements in the room had roused them from their sleep, touched her more acutely still. Brutus pushed his mighty muzzle companionably into her hand; and Cassius laid his friendly fore-paw on her lap. Her heart yearned over the two creatures as she patted and caressed them. It seemed only yesterday since she and the dogs at Combe-Raven had roamed the garden together, and had idled away the summer mornings luxuriously on the shady lawn.

Old Mazey found his hat at last, and they started on their exploring

expedition, with the dogs after them.

Leaving the basement story of the house, which was entirely devoted to the servants' offices, they ascended to the first floor, and entered the long corridor, with which Magdalen's last night's experience had already made her acquainted. "Put your back ag'in this wall," said old Mazey, pointing to the long wall--pierced at irregular intervals with windows looking out over a courtyard and fish-pond--which formed the right-hand side of the corridor, as Magdalen now stood. "Put your back here," said the veteran, "and look straight afore you. What do you see?"--"The opposite wall of the passage," said Magdalen.--"Ay! ay! what else?"--"The doors leading into the rooms."--"What else?"--"I see nothing else." Old Mazey chuckled, winked, and shook his knotty forefinger at Magdalen, impressively. "You see one of the Pints of the Compass, my dear. When you've got your back ag'in this wall, and when you look straight afore you, you look Noathe. If you ever get lost hereaway, put your back ag'in the wall, look out straight afore you, and say to yourself: 'I look Noathe!' You do that like a good girl, and you won't lose your bearings."

After administering this preliminary dose of instruction, old Mazey opened the first of the doors on the left-hand side of the passage. It led into the dining-room, with which Magdalen was already familiar. The second room was fitted up as a library; and the third, as a morning-room. The fourth and fifth doors--both belonging to dismantled and uninhabited rooms, and both locked--brought them to the end of the north wing of the house, and to the opening of a second and shorter passage, placed at a right angle to the first. Here old Mazey, who had divided his time pretty equally during the investigation of the rooms, in talking of "his honor the Admiral," and whistling to the dogs, returned with all possible expedition to the points of the compass, and gravely directed Magdalen to repeat the ceremony of putting her back against the wall. She attempted to shorten the proceedings, by declaring (quite correctly) that in her present position she knew she was looking east. "Don't you talk about the east, my dear," said old Mazey, proceeding unmoved with his own system of instruction, "till you know the east first. Put your back ag'in this wall, and look straight afore you. What do you see?" The remainder of the catechism proceeded as before. When the end was reached, Magdalen's instructor was satisfied. He chuckled and winked at her once more. "Now you may talk about the east, my dear," said the veteran, "for now you know it."

The east passage, after leading them on for a few yards only, terminated in a vestibule, with a high door in it which faced them as they advanced. The door admitted them to a large and lofty drawing-room, decorated, like all the

other apartments, with valuable old-fashioned furniture. Leading the way across this room, Magdalen's conductor pushed back a heavy sliding-door, opposite the door of entrance. "Put your apron over your head," said old Mazey. "We are coming to the Banqueting-Hall now. The floor's mortal cold, and the damp sticks to the place like cockroaches to a collier. His honor the admiral calls it the Arctic Passage. I've got my name for it, too--I call it, Freeze-your-Bones."

Magdalen passed through the doorway, and found herself in the ancient Banqueting-Hall of St. Crux.

On her left hand she saw a row of lofty windows, set deep in embrasures, and extending over a frontage of more than a hundred feet in length. On her right hand, ranged in one long row from end to end of the opposite wall, hung a dismal collection of black, begrimed old pictures, rotting from their frames, and representing battle-scenes by sea and land. Below the pictures, midway down the length of the wall, yawned a huge cavern of a fireplace, surmounted by a towering mantel-piece of black marble. The one object of furniture (if furniture it might be called) visible far or near in the vast emptiness of the place, was a gaunt ancient tripod of curiously chased metal, standing lonely in the middle of the hall, and supporting a wide circular pan, filled deep with ashes from an extinct charcoal fire. The high ceiling, once finely carved and gilt, was foul with dirt and cobwebs; the naked walls at either end of the room were stained with damp; and the cold of the marble floor struck through the narrow strip of matting laid down, parallel with the windows, as a foot-path for passengers across the wilderness of the room. No better name for it could have been devised than the name which old Mazey had found. "Freeze-your-Bones" accurately described, in three words, the Banqueting-Hall at St. Crux.

"Do you never light a fire in this dismal place?" asked Magdalen.

"It all depends on which side of Freeze-your-Bones his honor the admiral lives," said old Mazey. "His honor likes to shift his quarters, sometimes to one side of the house, sometimes to the other. If he lives Noathe of Freeze-your-Bones--which is where you've just come from--we don't waste our coals here. If he lives South of Freeze-your-Bones--which is where we are going to next--we light the fire in the grate and the charcoal in the pan. Every night, when we do that, the damp gets the better of us: every morning, we turn to again, and get the better of the damp."

With this remarkable explanation, old Mazey led the way to the lower end of the Hall, opened more doors, and showed Magdalen through another suite of

rooms, four in number, all of moderate size, and all furnished in much the same manner as the rooms in the northern wing. She looked out of the windows, and saw the neglected gardens of St. Crux, overgrown with brambles and weeds. Here and there, at no great distance in the grounds, the smoothly curving line of one of the tidal streams peculiar to the locality wound its way, gleaming in the sunlight, through gaps in the brambles and trees. The more distant view ranged over the flat eastward country beyond, speckled with its scattered little villages; crossed and recrossed by its network of "back-waters"; and terminated abruptly by the long straight line of sea-wall which protects the defenseless coast of Essex from invasion by the sea.

"Have we more rooms still to see?" asked Magdalen, turning from the view of the garden, and looking about her for another door.

"No more, my dear--we've run aground here, and we may as well wear round and put back again," said old Mazey. "There's another side of the house--due south of you as you stand now--which is all tumbling about our ears. You must go out into the garden if you want to see it; it's built off from us by a brick bulkhead, t'other side of this wall here. The monks lived due south of us, my dear, hundreds of years afore his honor the admiral was born or thought of, and a fine time of it they had, as I've heard. They sang in the church all the morning, and drank grog in the orchard all the afternoon. They slept off their grog on the best of feather-beds, and they fattened on the neighborhood all the year round. Lucky beggars! lucky beggars!"

Apostrophizing the monks in these terms, and evidently regretting that he had not lived himself in those good old times, the veteran led the way back through the rooms. On the return passage across "Freeze-your-Bones," Magdalen preceded him. "She's as straight as a poplar," mumbled old Mazey to himself, hobbling along after his youthful companion, and wagging his venerable head in cordial approval. "I never was particular what nation they belonged to; but I always did like 'em straight and fine grown, and I always shall like 'em straight and fine grown, to my dying day."

"Are there more rooms to see upstairs, on the second floor?" asked Magdalen, when they had returned to the point from which they had started.

The naturally clear, distinct tones of her voice had hitherto reached the old sailor's imperfect sense of hearing easily enough. Rather to her surprise, he became stone deaf on a sudden, to her last question.

"Are you sure of your Pints of the Compass?" he inquired. "If you're not sure, put your back ag'in the wall, and we'll go all over 'em again, my dear, beginning with the Noathe."

Magdalen assured him that she felt quite familiar, by this time, with all the points, the "Noathe" included; and then repeated her question in louder tones. The veteran obstinately matched her by becoming deafer than ever.

"Yes, my dear," he said, "you're right; it is chilly in these passages; and unless I go back to my fire, my fire'll go out--won't it? If you don't feel sure of your Pints of the Compass, come in to me and I'll put you right again." He winked benevolently, whistled to the dogs, and hobbled off. Magdalen heard him chuckle over his own success in balking her curiosity on the subject of the second floor. "I know how to deal with 'em!" said old Mazey to himself, in high triumph. "Tall and short, native and foreign, sweethearts and wives--I know how to deal with 'em!"

Left by herself, Magdalen exemplified the excellence of the old sailor's method of treatment, in her particular case, by ascending the stairs immediately, to make her own observations on the second floor. The stone passage here was exactly similar, except that more doors opened out of it, to the passage on the first floor. She opened the two nearest doors, one after another, at a venture, and discovered that both rooms were bed-chambers. The fear of being discovered by one of the woman-servants in a part of the house with which she had no concern, warned her not to push her investigations on the bedroom floor too far at starting. She hurriedly walked down the passage to see where it ended, discovered that it came to its termination in a lumber-room, answering to the position of the vestibule downstairs, and retraced her steps immediately.

On her way back she noticed an object which had previously escaped her attention. It was a low truckle-bed, placed parallel with the wall, and close to one of the doors on the bedroom side. In spite of its strange and comfortless situation, the bed was apparently occupied at night by a sleeper; the sheets were on it, and the end of a thick red fisherman's cap peeped out from under the pillow. She ventured on opening the door near which the bed was placed, and found herself, as she conjectured from certain signs and tokens, in the admiral's sleeping chamber. A moment's observation of the room was all she dared risk, and, softly closing the door again, she returned to the kitchen regions.

The truckle-bed, and the strange position in which it was placed, dwelt on her mind all through the afternoon. Who could possibly sleep in it? The

remembrance of the red fisherman's cap, and the knowledge she had already gained of Mazey's dog-like fidelity to his master, helped her to guess that the old sailor might be the occupant of the truckle-bed. But why, with bedrooms enough and to spare, should he occupy that cold and comfortless situation at night? Why should he sleep on guard outside his master's door? Was there some nocturnal danger in the house of which the admiral was afraid? The question seemed absurd, and yet the position of the bed forced it irresistibly on her mind.

Stimulated by her own ungovernable curiosity on this subject, Magdalen ventured to question the housekeeper. She acknowledged having walked from end to end of the passage on the second floor, to see if it was as long as the passage on the first; and she mentioned having noticed with astonishment the position of the truckle-bed. Mrs. Drake answered her implied inquiry shortly and sharply. "I don't blame a young girl like you," said the old lady, "for being a little curious when she first comes into such a strange house as this. But remember, for the future, that your business does not lie on the bedroom story. Mr. Mazey sleeps on that bed you noticed. It is his habit at night to sleep outside his master's door." With that meager explanation Mrs. Drake's lips closed, and opened no more.

Later in the day Magdalen found an opportunity of applying to old Mazey himself. She discovered the veteran in high good humor, smoking his pipe, and warming a tin mug of ale at his own snug fire.

"Mr. Mazey," she asked, boldly, "why do you put your bed in that cold passage?"

"What! you have been upstairs, you young jade, have you?" said old Mazey, looking up from his mug with a leer.

Magdalen smiled and nodded. "Come! come! tell me," she said, coaxingly. "Why do you sleep outside the admiral's door?"

"Why do you part your hair in the middle, my dear?" asked old Mazey, with another leer.

"I suppose, because I am accustomed to do it," answered Magdalen.

"Ay! ay!" said the veteran. "That's why, is it? Well, my dear, the reason why you part your hair in the middle is the reason why I sleep outside the admiral's door. I know how to deal with 'em!" chuckled old Mazey, lapsing into soliloquy, and stirring up his ale in high triumph. "Tall and short,

native and foreign, sweethearts and wives--I know how to deal with 'em!"

Magdalen's third and last attempt at solving the mystery of the truckle-bed was made while she was waiting on the admiral at dinner. The old gentleman's questions gave her an opportunity of referring to the subject, without any appearance of presumption or disrespect; but he proved to be quite as impenetrable, in his way, as old Mazey and Mrs. Drake had been in theirs. "It doesn't concern you, my dear," said the admiral, bluntly. "Don't be curious. Look in your Old Testament when you go downstairs, and see what happened in the Garden of Eden through curiosity. Be a good girl, and don't imitate your mother Eve."

Late at night, as Magdalen passed the end of the second-floor passage, proceeding alone on her way up to her own room, she stopped and listened. A screen was placed at the entrance of the corridor, so as to hide it from the view of persons passing on the stairs. The snoring she heard on the other side of the screen encouraged her to slip round it, and to advance a few steps. Shading the light of her candle with her hand, she ventured close to the admiral's door, and saw, to her surprise, that the bed had been moved since she had seen it in the day-time, so as to stand exactly across the door, and to bar the way entirely to any one who might attempt to enter the admiral's room. After this discovery, old Mazey himself, snoring lustily, with the red fisherman's cap pulled down to his eyebrows, and the blankets drawn up to his nose, became an object of secondary importance only, by comparison with his bed. That the veteran did actually sleep on guard before his master's door, and that he and the admiral and the housekeeper were in the secret of this unaccountable proceeding, was now beyond all doubt.

"A strange end," thought Magdalen, pondering over her discovery as she stole upstairs to her own sleeping-room--"a strange end to a strange day!"

CHAPTER II.

THE first week passed, the second week passed, and Magdalen was, to all appearance, no nearer to the discovery of the Secret Trust than on the day when she first entered on her service at St. Crux.

But the fortnight, uneventful as it was, had not been a fortnight lost. Experience had already satisfied her on one important point--experience had shown that she could set the rooted distrust of the other servants safely at defiance. Time had accustomed the women to her presence in the house, without shaking the vague conviction which possessed them all alike, that the newcomer was not one of themselves. All that Magdalen could do in her own defense was to keep the instinctive female suspicion of her confined within those purely negative limits which it had occupied from the first, and this she accomplished.

Day after day the women watched her with the untiring vigilance of malice and distrust, and day after day not the vestige of a discovery rewarded them for their pains. Silently, intelligently, and industriously--with an ever-present remembrance of herself and her place--the new parlor-maid did her work. Her only intervals of rest and relaxation were the intervals passed occasionally in the day with old Mazey and the dogs, and the precious interval of the night during which she was secure from observation in the solitude of her room. Thanks to the superfluity of bed-chambers at St. Crux, each one of the servants had the choice, if she pleased, of sleeping in a room of her own. Alone in the night, Magdalen might dare to be herself again--might dream of the past, and wake from the dream, encountering no curious eyes to notice that she was in tears--might ponder over the future, and be roused by no whisperings in corners, which tainted her with the suspicion of "having something on her mind."

Satisfied, thus far, of the perfect security of her position in the house, she profited next by a second chance in her favor, which--before the fortnight was at an end--relieved her mind of all doubt on the formidable subject of Mrs. Lecount.

Partly from the accidental gossip of the women at the table in the servants' hall; partly from a marked paragraph in a Swiss newspaper, which she had found one morning lying open on the admiral's easy-chair--she gained the welcome assurance that no danger was to be dreaded, this time, from the housekeeper's presence on the scene. Mrs. Lecount had, as it appeared,

passed a week or more at St. Crux after the date of her master's death, and had then left England, to live on the interest of her legacy, in honorable and prosperous retirement, in her native place. The paragraph in the Swiss newspaper described the fulfillment of this laudable project. Mrs. Lecount had not only established herself at Zurich, but (wisely mindful of the uncertainty of life) had also settled the charitable uses to which her fortune was to be applied after her death. One half of it was to go to the founding of a "Lecompte Scholarship" for poor students in the University of Geneva. The other half was to be employed by the municipal authorities of Zurich in the maintenance and education of a certain number of orphan girls, natives of the city, who were to be trained for domestic service in later life. The Swiss journalist adverted to these philanthropic bequests in terms of extravagant eulogy. Zurich was congratulated on the possession of a Paragon of public virtue; and William Tell, in the character of benefactor to Switzerland, was compared disadvantageously with Mrs. Lecount.

The third week began, and Magdalen was now at liberty to take her first step forward on the way to the discovery of the Secret Trust.

She ascertained from old Mazey that it was his master's custom, during the winter and spring months, to occupy the rooms in the north wing; and during the summer and autumn to cross the Arctic passage of "Freeze-your-Bones," and live in the eastward apartments which looked out on the garden. While the Banqueting-Hall remained--owing to the admiral's inadequate pecuniary resources--in its damp and dismantled state, and while the interior of St. Crux was thus comfortlessly divided into two separate residences, no more convenient arrangement than this could well have been devised. Now and then (as Magdalen understood from her informant) there were days, both in winter and summer, when the admiral became anxious about the condition of the rooms which he was not occupying at the time, and when he insisted on investigating the state of the furniture, the pictures, and the books with his own eyes. On these occasions, in summer as in winter, a blazing fire was kindled for some days previously in the large grate, and the charcoal was lighted in the tripod-pan, to keep the Banqueting-Hall as warm as circumstances would admit. As soon as the old gentleman's anxieties were set at rest the rooms were shut up again, and "Freeze-your-Bones" was once more abandoned for weeks and weeks together to damp, desolation, and decay. The last of these temporary migrations had taken place only a few days since; the admiral had satisfied himself that the rooms in the east wing were none the worse for the absence of their master, and he might now be safely reckoned on as settled in the north wing for weeks, and perhaps, if the season was cold, for months to come.

Trifling as they might be in themselves, these particulars were of serious importance to Magdalen, for they helped her to fix the limits of the field of search. Assuming that the admiral was likely to keep all his important documents within easy reach of his own hand, she might now feel certain that the Secret Trust was secured in one or other of the rooms in the north wing.

In which room? That question was not easy to answer.

Of the four inhabitable rooms which were all at the admiral's disposal during the day--that is to say, of the dining-room, the library, the morning-room, and the drawing-room opening out of the vestibule--the library appeared to be the apartment in which, if he had a preference, he passed the greater part of his time. There was a table in this room, with drawers that locked; there was a magnificent Italian cabinet, with doors that locked; there were five cupboards under the book-cases, every one of which locked. There were receptacles similarly secured in the other rooms; and in all or any of these papers might be kept.

She had answered the bell, and had seen him locking and unlocking, now in one room, now in another, but oftenest in the library. She had noticed occasionally that his expression was fretful and impatient when he looked round at her from an open cabinet or cupboard and gave his orders; and she inferred that something in connection with his papers and possessions--it might or might not be the Secret Trust--irritated and annoyed him from time to time. She had heard him more than once lock something up in one of the rooms, come out and go into another room, wait there a few minutes, then return to the first room with his keys in his hand, and sharply turn the locks and turn them again. This fidgety anxiety about his keys and his cupboards might be the result of the inbred restlessness of his disposition, aggravated in a naturally active man by the aimless indolence of a life in retirement--a life drifting backward and forward among trifles, with no regular employment to steady it at any given hour of the day. On the other hand, it was just as probable that these comings and goings, these lockings and unlockings, might be attributable to the existence of some private responsibility which had unexpectedly intruded itself into the old man's easy existence, and which tormented him with a sense of oppression new to the experience of his later years. Either one of these interpretations might explain his conduct as reasonably and as probably as the other. Which was the right interpretation of the two, it was, in Magdalen's position, impossible to say.

The one certain discovery at which she arrived was made in her first day's observation of him. The admiral was a rigidly careful man with his keys.

All the smaller keys he kept on a ring in the breast-pocket of his coat. The larger he locked up together; generally, but not always, in one of the drawers of the library table. Sometimes he left them secured in this way at night; sometimes he took them up to the bedroom with him in a little basket. He had no regular times for leaving them or for taking them away with him; he had no discoverable reason for now securing them in the library-table drawer, and now again locking them up in some other place. The inveterate willfulness and caprice of his proceedings in these particulars defied every effort to reduce them to a system, and baffled all attempts at calculating on them beforehand.

The hope of gaining positive information to act on, by laying artful snares for him which he might fall into in his talk, proved, from the outset, to be utterly futile.

In Magdalen's situation all experiments of this sort would have been in the last degree difficult and dangerous with any man. With the admiral they were simply impossible. His tendency to veer about from one subject to another; his habit of keeping his tongue perpetually going, so long as there was anybody, no matter whom, within reach of the sound of his voice; his comical want of all dignity and reserve with his servants, promised, in appearance, much, and performed in reality nothing. No matter how diffidently or how respectfully Magdalen might presume on her master's example, and on her master's evident liking for her, the old man instantly discovered the advance she was making from her proper position, and instantly put her back in it again, with a quaint good humor which inflicted no pain, but with a blunt straightforwardness of purpose which permitted no escape. Contradictory as it may sound, Admiral Bartram was too familiar to be approached; he kept the distance between himself and his servant more effectually than if he had been the proudest man in England. The systematic reserve of a superior toward an inferior may be occasionally overcome--the systematic familiarity never.

Slowly the time dragged on. The fourth week came; and Magdalen had made no new discoveries. The prospect was depressing in the last degree. Even in the apparently hopeless event of her devising a means of getting at the admiral's keys, she could not count on retaining possession of them unsuspected more than a few hours--hours which might be utterly wasted through her not knowing in what direction to begin the search. The Trust might be locked up in any one of some twenty receptacles for papers,

situated in four different rooms; and which room was the likeliest to look in, which receptacle was the most promising to begin with, which position among other heaps of papers the one paper needful might be expected to occupy, was more than she could say. Hemmed in by immeasurable uncertainties on every side; condemned, as it were, to wander blindfold on the very brink of success, she waited for the chance that never came, for the event that never happened, with a patience which was sinking already into the patience of despair.

Night after night she looked back over the vanished days, and not an event rose on her memory to distinguish them one from the other. The only interruptions to the weary uniformity of the life at St. Crux were caused by the characteristic delinquencies of old Mazey and the dogs.

At certain intervals, the original wildness broke out in the natures of Brutus and Cassius. The modest comforts of home, the savory charms of made dishes, the decorous joy of digestions accomplished on hearth-rugs, lost all their attractions, and the dogs ungratefully left the house to seek dissipation and adventure in the outer world. On these occasions the established after-dinner formula of question and answer between old Mazey and his master varied a little in one particular. "God bless the Queen, Mazey," and "How's the wind, Mazey?" were followed by a new inquiry: "Where are the dogs, Mazey?" "Out on the loose, your honor, and be damned to 'em," was the veteran's unvarying answer. The admiral always sighed and shook his head gravely at the news, as if Brutus and Cassius had been sons of his own, who treated him with a want of proper filial respect. In two or three days' time the dogs always returned, lean, dirty, and heartily ashamed of themselves. For the whole of the next day they were invariably tied up in disgrace. On the day after they were scrubbed clean, and were formally re-admitted to the dining-room. There, Civilization, acting through the subtle medium of the Saucepan, recovered its hold on them; and the admiral's two prodigal sons, when they saw the covers removed, watered at the mouth as copiously as ever.

Old Mazey, in his way, proved to be just as disreputably inclined on certain occasions as the dogs. At intervals, the original wildness in his nature broke out; he, too, lost all relish for the comforts of home, and ungratefully left the house. He usually disappeared in the afternoon, and returned at night as drunk as liquor could make him. He was by many degrees too seasoned a vessel to meet with any disasters on these occasions. His wicked old legs might take roundabout methods of progression, but they never failed him; his wicked old eyes might see double, but they always showed him the way home. Try as hard as they might, the servants could never succeed in

persuading him that he was drunk; he always scorned the imputation. He even declined to admit the idea privately into his mind, until he had first tested his condition by an infallible criterion of his own.

It was his habit, in these cases of Bacchanalian emergency, to stagger obstinately into his room on the ground-floor, to take the model-ship out of the cupboard, and to try if he could proceed with the never-to-be-completed employment of setting up the rigging. When he had smashed the tiny spars, and snapped asunder the delicate ropes--then, and not till then, the veteran admitted facts as they were, on the authority of practical evidence. "Ay! ay!" he used to say confidentially to himself, "the women are right. Drunk again, Mazey--drunk again!" Having reached this discovery, it was his habit to wait cunningly in the lower regions until the admiral was safe in his room, and then to ascend in discreet list slippers to his post. Too wary to attempt getting into the truckle-bed (which would have been only inviting the catastrophe of a fall against his master's door), he always walked himself sober up and down the passage. More than once Magdalen had peeped round the screen, and had seen the old sailor unsteadily keeping his watch, and fancying himself once more at his duty on board ship. "This is an uncommonly lively vessel in a sea-way," he used to mutter under his breath, when his legs took him down the passage in zigzag directions, or left him for the moment studying the "Pints of the Compass" on his own system, with his back against the wall. "A nasty night, mind you," he would maunder on, taking another turn. "As dark as your pocket, and the wind heading us again from the old quarter." On the next day old Mazey, like the dogs, was kept downstairs in disgrace. On the day after, like the dogs again, he was reinstated in his privileges; and another change was introduced in the after-dinner formula. On entering the room, the old sailor stopped short and made his excuses in this brief yet comprehensive form of words, with his back against the door: "Please your honor, I'm ashamed of myself." So the apology began and ended. "This mustn't happen again, Mazey," the admiral used to answer. "It shan't happen again, your honor." "Very good. Come here, and drink your glass of wine. God bless the Queen, Mazey." The veteran tossed off his port, and the dialogue ended as usual.

So the days passed, with no incidents more important than these to relieve their monotony, until the end of the fourth week was at hand.

On the last day, an event happened; on the last day, the long deferred promise of the future unexpectedly began to dawn. While Magdalen was spreading the cloth in the dining-room, as usual, Mrs. Drake looked in, and instructed her on this occasion, for the first time, to lay the table for two persons. The admiral had received a letter from his nephew. Early that

evening Mr. George Bartram was expected to return to St. Cruz.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER placing the second cover, Magdalen awaited the ringing of the dinner-bell, with an interest and impatience which she found it no easy task to conceal. The return of Mr. Bartram would, in all probability, produce a change in the life of the house; and from change of any kind, no matter how trifling, something might be hoped. The nephew might be accessible to influences which had failed to reach the uncle. In any case, the two would talk of their affairs over their dinner; and through that talk--proceeding day after day in her presence--the way to discovery, now absolutely invisible, might, sooner or later, show itself.

At last the bell rang, the door opened, and the two gentlemen entered the room together.

Magdalen was struck, as her sister had been struck, by George Bartram's resemblance to her father--judging by the portrait at Combe-Raven, which presented the likeness of Andrew Vanstone in his younger days. The light hair and florid complexion, the bright blue eyes and hardy upright figure, familiar to her in the picture, were all recalled to her memory, as the nephew followed the uncle across the room and took his place at table. She was not prepared for this sudden revival of the lost associations of home. Her attention wandered as she tried to conceal its effect on her; and she made a blunder in waiting at table, for the first time since she had entered the house.

A quaint reprimand from the admiral, half in jest, half in earnest, gave her time to recover herself. She ventured another look at George Bartram. The impression which he produced on her this time roused her curiosity immediately. His face and manner plainly expressed anxiety and preoccupation of mind. He looked oftener at his plate than at his uncle, and at Magdalen herself (except one passing inspection of the new parlor-maid, when the admiral spoke to her) he never looked at all. Some uncertainty was evidently troubling his thoughts; some oppression was weighing on his natural freedom of manner. What uncertainty? what oppression? Would any personal revelations come out, little by little, in the course of conversation at the dinner-table?

No. One set of dishes followed another set of dishes, and nothing in the shape of a personal revelation took place. The conversation halted on irregularly, between public affairs on one side and trifling private topics on

the other. Politics, home and foreign, took their turn with the small household history of St. Crux; the leaders of the revolution which expelled Louis Philippe from the throne of France marched side by side, in the dinner-table review, with old Mazey and the dogs. The dessert was put on the table, the old sailor came in, drank his loyal toast, paid his respects to "Master George," and went out again. Magdalen followed him, on her way back to the servants' offices, having heard nothing in the conversation of the slightest importance to the furtherance of her own design, from the first word of it to the last. She struggled hard not to lose heart and hope on the first day. They could hardly talk again to-morrow, they could hardly talk again the next day, of the French Revolution and the dogs. Time might do wonders yet; and time was all her own.

Left together over their wine, the uncle and nephew drew their easy-chairs on either side of the fire; and, in Magdalen's absence, began the very conversation which it was Magdalen's interest to hear.

"Claret, George?" said the admiral, pushing the bottle across the table. "You look out of spirits."

"I am a little anxious, sir," replied George, leaving his glass empty, and looking straight into the fire.

"I am glad to hear it," rejoined the admiral. "I am more than a little anxious myself, I can tell you. Here we are at the last days of March--and nothing done! Your time comes to an end on the third of May; and there you sit, as if you had years still before you, to turn round in."

George smiled, and resignedly helped himself to some wine.

"Am I really to understand, sir," he asked, "that you are serious in what you said to me last November? Are you actually resolved to bind me to that incomprehensible condition?"

"I don't call it incomprehensible," said the admiral, irritably.

"Don't you, sir? I am to inherit your estate, unconditionally--as you have generously settled it from the first. But I am not to touch a farthing of the fortune poor Noel left you unless I am married within a certain time. The house and lands are to be mine (thanks to your kindness) under any circumstances. But the money with which I might improve them both is to be arbitrarily taken away from me, if I am not a married man on the third of May. I am sadly wanting in intelligence, I dare say, but a more

incomprehensible proceeding I never heard of!"

"No snapping and snarling, George! Say your say o ut. We don't understand sneering in Her Majesty's Navy!"

"I mean no offense, sir. But I think it's a little hard to astonish me by a change of proceeding on your part, entirely foreign to my experience of your character--and then, when I naturally ask for an explanation, to turn round coolly and leave me in the dark. If you and Noel came to some private arrangement together before he made his will, why not tell me? Why set up a mystery between us, where no mystery need be?"

"I won't have it, George!" cried the admiral, angrily drumming on the table with the nutcrackers. "You are trying to draw me like a badger, but I won't be drawn! I'll make any conditions I please; and I'll be accountable to nobody for them unless I like. It's quite bad enough to have worries and responsibilities laid on my unlucky shoulders that I never bargained for--never mind what worries: they're not yours, they're mine--without being questioned and cross-questioned as if I was a witness in a box. Here's a pretty fellow!" continued the admiral, apostrophizing his nephew in red-hot irritation, and addressing himself to the dogs on the hearth-rug for want of a better audience. "Here's a pretty fellow? He is asked to help himself to two uncommonly comfortable things in their way--a fortune and a wife; he is allowed six months to get the wife in (we should have got her, in the Navy, bag and baggage, in six days); he has a round dozen of nice girls, to my certain knowledge, in one part of the country and another, all at his disposal to choose from, and what does he do? He sits month after month, with his lazy legs crossed before him; he leaves the girls to pine on the stem, and he bothers his uncle to know the reason why! I pity the poor unfortunate women. Men were made of flesh and blood, and plenty of it, too, in my time. They're made of machinery now."

"I can only repeat, sir, I am sorry to have offended you," said George.

"Pooh! pooh! you needn't look at me in that languishing way if you are," retorted the admiral. "Stick to your wine, and I'll forgive you. Your good health, George. I'm glad to see you again at St. Crux. Look at that plateful of sponge-cakes! The cook has sent them up in honor of your return. We can't hurt her feelings, and we can't spoil our wine. Here!"--The admiral tossed four sponge-cakes in quick succession down the accommodating throats of the dogs. "I am sorry, George," the old gentleman gravely proceeded; "I am really sorry you haven't got your eye on one of those nice girls. You don't know what a loss you're inflicting on yourself; you don't know what trouble

and mortification you're causing me by this shilly-shally conduct of yours."

"If you would only allow me to explain myself, sir, you would view my conduct in a totally different light. I am ready to marry to-morrow, if the lady will have me."

"The devil you are! So you have got a lady in your eye, after all? Why in Heaven's name couldn't you tell me so before? Never mind, I'll forgive you everything, now I know you have laid your hand on a wife. Fill your glass again. Here's her health in a bumper. By-the-by, who is she?"

"I'll tell you directly, admiral. When we began this conversation, I mentioned that I was a little anxious--"

"She's not one of my round dozen of nice girls--aha, Master George, I see that in your face already! Why are you anxious?"

"I am afraid you will disapprove of my choice, sir."

"Don't beat about the bush! How the deuce can I say whether I disapprove or not, if you won't tell me who she is?"

"She is the eldest daughter of Andrew Vanstone, of Combe-Raven."

"Who!!!"

"Miss Vanstone, sir."

The admiral put down his glass of wine untasted.

"You're right, George," he said. "I do disapprove of your choice --strongly disapprove of it."

"Is it the misfortune of her birth, sir, that you object to?"

"God forbid! the misfortune of her birth is not her fault, poor thing. You know as well as I do, George, what I object to."

"You object to her sister?"

"Certainly! The most liberal man alive might object to her sister, I think."

"It's hard, sir, to make Miss Vanstone suffer for her sister's faults."

"Faults, do you call them? You have a mighty convenient memory, George, when your own interests are concerned."

"Call them crimes if you like, sir--I say again, it's hard on Miss Vanstone. Miss Vanstone's life is pure of all reproach. From first to last she has borne her hard lot with such patience, and sweetness, and courage as not one woman in a thousand would have shown in her place. Ask Miss Garth, who has known her from childhood. Ask Mrs. Tyrrel, who blesses the day when she came into the house--"

"Ask a fiddlestick's end! I beg your pardon, George, but you are enough to try the patience of a saint. My good fellow, I don't deny Miss Vanstone's virtues. I'll admit, if you like, she's the best woman that ever put on a petticoat. That is not the question--"

"Excuse me, admiral--it is the question, if she is to be my wife."

"Hear me out, George; look at it from my point of view, as well as your own. What did your cousin Noel do? Your cousin Noel fell a victim, poor fellow, to one of the vilest conspiracies I ever heard of, and the prime mover of that conspiracy was Miss Vanstone's damnable sister. She deceived him in the most infamous manner; and as soon as she was down for a handsome legacy in his will, she had the poison ready to take his life. This is the truth; we know it from Mrs. Lecount, who found the bottle locked up in her own room. If you marry Miss Vanstone, you make this wretch your sister-in-law. She becomes a member of our family. All the disgrace of what she has done; all the disgrace of what she may do--and the Devil, who possesses her, only knows what lengths she may go to next--becomes our disgrace. Good heavens, George, consider what a position that is! Consider what pitch you touch, if you make this woman your sister-in-law."

"You have put your side of the question, admiral," said George resolutely; "now let me put mine. A certain impression is produced on me by a young lady whom I meet with under very interesting circumstances. I don't act headlong on that impression, as I might have done if I had been some years younger; I wait, and put it to the trial. Every time I see this young lady the impression strengthens; her beauty grows on me, her character grows on me; when I am away from her, I am restless and dissatisfied; when I am with her, I am the happiest man alive. All I hear of her conduct from those who know her best more than confirms the high opinion I have formed of her. The one drawback I can discover is caused by a misfortune for which she is not responsible--the misfortune of having a sister who is utterly unworthy of

her. Does this discovery--an unpleasant discovery, I grant you--destroy all those good qualities in Miss Vanstone for which I love and admire her? Nothing of the sort--it only makes her good qualities all the more precious to me by contrast. If I am to have a drawback to contend with--and who expects anything else in this world?--I would infinitely rather have the drawback attached to my wife's sister than to my wife. My wife's sister is not essential to my happiness, but my wife is. In my opinion, sir, Mrs. Noel Vanstone has done mischief enough already. I don't see the necessity of letting her do more mischief, by depriving me of a good wife. Right or wrong, that is my point of view. I don't wish to trouble you with any questions of sentiment. All I wish to say is that I am old enough by this time to know my own mind, and that my mind is made up. If my marriage is essential to the execution of your intentions on my behalf, there is only one woman in the world whom I can marry, and that woman is Miss Vanstone."

There was no resisting this plain declaration. Admiral Bartram rose from his chair without making any reply, and walked perturbedly up and down the room.

The situation was emphatically a serious one. Mrs. Girdlestone's death had already produced the failure of one of the two objects contemplated by the Secret Trust. If the third of May arrived and found George a single man, the second (and last) of the objects would then have failed in its turn. In little more than a fortnight, at the very latest, the Banns must be published in Ossory church, or the time would fail for compliance with one of the stipulations insisted on in the Trust. Obstinate as the admiral was by nature, strongly as he felt the objections which attached to his nephew's contemplated alliance, he recoiled in spite of himself, as he paced the room and saw the facts on either side immovably staring him in the face.

"Are you engaged to Miss Vanstone?" he asked, suddenly.

"No, sir," replied George. "I thought it due to your uniform kindness to me to speak to you on the subject first."

"Much obliged, I'm sure. And you have put off speaking to me to the last moment, just as you put off everything else. Do you think Miss Vanstone will say yes when you ask her?"

George hesitated.

"The devil take your modesty!" shouted the admiral. "This is not a time for modesty; this is a time for speaking out. Will she or won't she?"

"I think she will, sir."

The admiral laughed sardonically, and took another turn in the room. He suddenly stopped, put his hands in his pockets, and stood still in a corner, deep in thought. After an interval of a few minutes, his face cleared a little; it brightened with the dawning of a new idea. He walked round briskly to George's side of the fire, and laid his hand kindly on his nephew's shoulder.

"You're wrong, George," he said; "but it is too late now to set you right. On the sixteenth of next month the Banns must be put up in Ossory church, or you will lose the money. Have you told Miss Vanstone the position you stand in? Or have you put that off to the eleventh hour, like everything else?"

"The position is so extraordinary, sir, and it might lead to so much misapprehension of my motives, that I have felt unwilling to allude to it. I hardly know how I can tell her of it at all."

"Try the experiment of telling her friends. Let them know it's a question of money, and they will overcome her scruples, if you can't. But that is not what I had to say to you. How long do you propose stopping here this time?"

"I thought of staying a few days, and then--"

"And then of going back to London and making your offer, I suppose? Will a week give you time enough to pick your opportunity with Miss Vanstone--a week out of the fortnight or so that you have to spare?"

"I will stay here a week, admiral, with pleasure, if you wish it."

"I don't wish it. I want you to pack up your traps and be off to-morrow."

George looked at his uncle in silent astonishment.

"You found some letters waiting for you when you got here," proceeded the admiral. "Was one of those letters from my old friend, Sir Franklin Brock?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was it an invitation to you to go and stay at the Grange?"

"Yes, sir."

"To go at once?"

"At once, if I could manage it."

"Very good. I want you to manage it; I want you to start for the Grange to-morrow."

George looked back at the fire, and sighed impatiently.

"I understand you now, admiral," he said. "You are entirely mistaken in me. My attachment to Miss Vanstone is not to be shaken in that manner."

Admiral Bartram took his quarter-deck walk again, up and down the room.

"One good turn deserves another, George," said the old gentleman. "If I am willing to make concessions on my side, the least you can do is to meet me half-way, and make concessions on yours."

"I don't deny it, sir."

"Very well. Now listen to my proposal. Give me a fair hearing, George--a fair hearing is every man's privilege. I will be perfectly just to begin with. I won't attempt to deny that you honestly believe Miss Vanstone is the only woman in the world who can make you happy. I don't question that. What I do question is, whether you really know your own mind in this matter quite so well as you think you know it yourself. You can't deny, George, that you have been in love with a good many women in your time? Among the rest of them, you have been in love with Miss Brock. No longer ago than this time last year there was a sneaking kindness between you and that young lady, to say the least of it. And quite right, too! Miss Brock is one of that round dozen of darlings I mentioned over our first glass of wine."

"You are confusing an idle flirtation, sir, with a serious attachment," said George. "You are altogether mistaken--you are, indeed."

"Likely enough; I don't pretend to be infallible--I leave that to my juniors. But I happen to have known you, George, since you were the height of my old telescope; and I want to have this serious attachment of yours put to the test. If you can satisfy me that your whole heart and soul are as strongly set on Miss Vanstone as you suppose them to be, I must knock under to necessity, and keep my objections to myself. But I must be satisfied first. Go to the Grange to-morrow, and stay there a week in Miss Brock's society. Give that charming girl a fair chance of lighting up the old flame again if she

can, and then come back to St. Crux, and let me hear the result. If you tell me, as an honest man, that your attachment to Miss Vanstone still remains unshaken, you will have heard the last of my objections from that moment. Whatever misgivings I may feel in my own mind, I will say nothing, and do nothing, adverse to your wishes. There is my proposal. I dare say it looks like an old man's folly, in your eyes. But the old man won't trouble you much longer, George; and it may be a pleasant reflection, when you have got sons of your own, to remember that you humored him in his last days."

He came back to the fire-place as he said those words, and laid his hand once more on his nephew's shoulder. George took the hand and pressed it affectionately. In the tenderest and best sense of the word, his uncle had been a father to him.

"I will do what you ask me, sir," he replied, "if you seriously wish it. But it is only right to tell you that the experiment will be perfectly useless. However, if you prefer my passing a week at the Grange to my passing it here, to the Grange I will go."

"Thank you, George," said the admiral, bluntly. "I expected as much from you, and you have not disappointed me.--If Miss Brock doesn't get us out of this mess," thought the wily old gentleman, as he resumed his place at the table, "my nephew's weather-cock of a head has turned steady with a vengeance!--We'll consider the question settled for to-night, George," he continued, aloud, "and call another subject. These family anxieties don't improve the flavor of my old claret. The bottle stands with you. What are they doing at the theaters in London? We always patronized the theaters, in my time, in the Navy. We used to like a good tragedy to begin with, and a hornpipe to cheer us up at the end of the entertainment."

For the rest of the evening, the talk flowed in the ordinary channels. Admiral Bartram only returned to the forbidden subject when he and his nephew parted for the night.

"You won't forget to-morrow, George?"

"Certainly not, sir. I'll take the dog-cart, and drive myself over after breakfast."

Before noon the next day Mr. George Bartram had left the house, and the last chance in Magdalen's favor had left it with him.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the servants' dinner-bell at St. Crux rang as usual on the day of George Bartram's departure, it was remarked that the new parlor-maid's place at table remained empty. One of the inferior servants was sent to her room to make inquiries, and returned with the information that "Louisa" felt a little faint, and begged that her attendance at table might be excused for that day. Upon this, the superior authority of the housekeeper was invoked, and Mrs. Drake went upstairs immediately to ascertain the truth for herself. Her first look of inquiry satisfied her that the parlor-maid's indisposition, whatever the cause of it might be, was certainly not assumed to serve any idle or sullen purpose of her own. She respectfully declined taking any of the remedies which the housekeeper offered, and merely requested permission to try the efficacy of a walk in the fresh air.

"I have been accustomed to more exercise, ma'am, than I take here," she said. "Might I go into the garden, and try what the air will do for me?"

"Certainly. Can you walk by yourself, or shall I send some one with you?"

"I will go by myself, if you please, ma'am."

"Very well. Put on your bonnet and shawl, and, when you get out, keep in the east garden. The admiral sometimes walks in the north garden, and he might feel surprised at seeing you there. Come to my room, when you have had air and exercise enough, and let me see how you are."

In a few minutes more Magdalen was out in the east garden. The sky was clear and sunny; but the cold shadow of the house rested on the garden walk and chilled the midday air. She walked toward the ruins of the old monastery, situated on the south side of the more modern range of buildings. Here there were lonely open spaces to breathe in freely; here the pale March sunshine stole through the gaps of desolation and decay, and met her invitingly with the genial promise of spring.

She ascended three or four riven stone steps, and seated herself on some ruined fragments beyond them, full in the sunshine. The place she had chosen had once been the entrance to the church. In centuries long gone by, the stream of human sin and human suffering had flowed, day after day, to the confessional, over the place where she now sat. Of all the miserable women who had trodden those old stones in the bygone time, no more

miserable creature had touched them than the woman whose feet rested on them now.

Her hands trembled as she placed them on either side of her, to support herself on the stone seat. She laid them on her lap; they trembled there. She held them out, and looked at them wonderingly; they trembled as she looked. "Like an old woman!" she said, faintly, and let them drop again at her side.

For the first time, that morning, the cruel discovery had forced itself on her mind--the discovery that her strength was failing her, at the time when she had most confidently trusted to it, at the time when she wanted it most. She had felt the surprise of Mr. Bartram's unexpected departure, as if it had been the shock of the severest calamity that could have befallen her. That one check to her hopes--a check which at other times would only have roused the resisting power in her to new efforts--had struck her with as suffocating a terror, had prostrated her with as all-mastering a despair, as if she had been overwhelmed by the crowning disaster of expulsion from St. Crux. But one warning could be read in such a change as this. Into the space of little more than a year she had crowded the wearing and wasting emotions of a life. The bountiful gifts of health and strength, so prodigally heaped on her by Nature, so long abused with impunity, were failing her at last.

She looked up at the far faint blue of the sky. She heard the joyous singing of birds among the ivy that clothed the ruins. Oh the cold distance of the heavens! Oh the pitiless happiness of the birds! Oh the lonely horror of sitting there, and feeling old and weak and worn, in the heyday of her youth! She rose with a last effort of resolution, and tried to keep back the hysterical passion swelling at her heart by moving and looking about her. Rapidly and more rapidly she walked to and fro in the sunshine. The exercise helped her, through the very fatigue that she felt from it. She forced the rising tears desperately back to their sources; she fought with the clinging pain, and wrenched it from its hold. Little by little her mind began to clear again: the despairing fear of herself grew less vividly present to her thoughts. There were reserves of youth and strength in her still to be wasted; there was a spirit sorely wounded, but not yet subdued.

She gradually extended the limits of her walk; she gradually recovered the exercise of her observation.

At the western extremity the remains of the monastery were in a less ruinous condition than at the eastern. In certain places, where the stout old

walls still stood, repairs had been made at some former time. Roofs of red tile had been laid roughly over four of the ancient cells; wooden doors had been added; and the old monastic chambers had been used as sheds to hold the multifarious lumber of St. Crux. No padlocks guarded any of the doors. Magdalen had only to push them to let the daylight in on the litter inside. She resolved to investigate the sheds one after the other--not from curiosity, not with the idea of making discoveries of any sort. Her only object was to fill up the vacant time, and to keep the thoughts that unnerved her from returning to her mind.

The first shed she opened contained the gardener's utensils, large and small. The second was littered with fragments of broken furniture, empty picture-frames of worm-eaten wood, shattered vases, boxes without covers, and books torn from their bindings. As Magdalen turned to leave the shed, after one careless glance round her at the lumber that it contained, her foot struck something on the ground which tinkled against a fragment of china lying near it. She stooped, and discovered that the tinkling substance was a rusty key.

She picked up the key and looked at it. She walked out into the air, and considered a little. More old forgotten keys were probably lying about among the lumber in the sheds. What if she collected all she could find, and tried them, one after another, in the locks of the cabinets and cupboards now closed against her? Was there chance enough that any one of them might fit to justify her in venturing on the experiment? If the locks at St. Crux were as old-fashioned as the furniture--if there were no protective niceties of modern invention to contend against--there was chance enough beyond all question. Who could say whether the very key in her hand might not be the lost duplicate of one of the keys on the admiral's bunch? In the dearth of all other means of finding the way to her end, the risk was worth running. A flash of the old spirit sparkled in her weary eyes as she turned and re-entered the shed.

Half an hour more brought her to the limits of the time which she could venture to allow herself in the open air. In that interval she had searched the sheds from first to last, and had found five more keys. "Five more chances!" she thought to herself, as she hid the keys, and hastily returned to the house.

After first reporting herself in the housekeeper's room, she went upstairs to remove her bonnet and shawl; taking that opportunity to hide the keys in her bed-chamber until night came. They were crusted thick with rust and dirt; but she dared not attempt to clean them until bed-time secluded her

from the prying eyes of the servants in the solitude of her room.

When the dinner hour brought her, as usual, into personal contact with the admiral, she was at once struck by a change in him. For the first time in her experience the old gentleman was silent and depressed. He ate less than usual, and he hardly said five words to her from the beginning of the meal to the end. Some unwelcome subject of reflection had evidently fixed itself on his mind, and remained there persistently, in spite of his efforts to shake it off. At intervals through the evening, she wondered with an ever-growing perplexity what the subject could be.

At last the lagging hours reached their end, and bed-time came. Before she slept that night Magdalen had cleaned the keys from all impurities, and had oiled the wards, to help them smoothly into the locks. The last difficulty that remained was the difficulty of choosing the time when the experiment might be tried with the least risk of interruption and discovery. After carefully considering the question overnight, Magdalen could only resolve to wait and be guided by the events of the next day.

The morning came, and for the first time at St. Crux events justified the trust she had placed in them. The morning came, and the one remaining difficulty that perplexed her was unexpectedly smoothed away by no less a person than the admiral himself! To the surprise of every one in the house, he announced at breakfast that he had arranged to start for London in an hour; that he should pass the night in town; and that he might be expected to return to St. Crux in time for dinner on the next day. He volunteered no further explanations to the housekeeper or to any one else, but it was easy to see that his errand to London was of no ordinary importance in his own estimation. He swallowed his breakfast in a violent hurry, and he was impatiently ready for the carriage before it came to the door.

Experience had taught Magdalen to be cautious. She waited a little, after Admiral Bartram's departure, before she ventured on trying her experiment with the keys. It was well she did so. Mrs. Drake took advantage of the admiral's absence to review the condition of the apartments on the first floor. The results of the investigation by no means satisfied her; brooms and dusters were set to work; and the house-maids were in and out of the rooms perpetually, as long as the daylight lasted.

The evening passed, and still the safe opportunity for which Magdalen was on the watch never presented itself. Bed-time came again, and found her placed between the two alternatives of trusting to the doubtful chances of the next morning, or of trying the keys boldly in the dead of night. In former

times she would have made her choice without hesitation. She hesitated now; but the wreck of her old courage still sustained her, and she determined to make the venture at night.

They kept early hours at St. Crux. If she waited in her room until half-past eleven, she would wait long enough. At that time she stole out on to the staircase, with the keys in her pocket, and the candle in her hand.

On passing the entrance to the corridor on the bedroom floor, she stopped and listened. No sound of snoring, no shuffling of infirm footsteps was to be heard on the other side of the screen. She looked round it distrustfully. The stone passage was a solitude, and the truckle-bed was empty. Her own eyes had shown her old Mazey on his way to the upper regions, more than an hour since, with a candle in his hand. Had he taken advantage of his master's absence to enjoy the unaccustomed luxury of sleeping in a room? As the thought occurred to her, a sound from the further end of the corridor just caught her ear. She softly advanced toward it, and heard through the door of the last and remotest of the spare bed-chambers the veteran's lusty snoring in the room inside. The discovery was startling, in more senses than one. It deepened the impenetrable mystery of the truckle-bed; for it showed plainly that old Mazey had no barbarous preference of his own for passing his nights in the corridor; he occupied that strange and comfortless sleeping-place purely and entirely on his master's account.

It was no time for dwelling on the reflections which this conclusion might suggest. Magdalen retraced her steps along the passage, and descended to the first floor. Passing the doors nearest to her, she tried the library first. On the staircase and in the corridors she had felt her heart throbbing fast with an unutterable fear; but a sense of security returned to her when she found herself within the four walls of the room, and when she had closed the door on the ghostly quiet outside.

The first lock she tried was the lock of the table-drawer. None of the keys fitted it. Her next experiment was made on the cabinet. Would the second attempt fail, like the first?

No! One of the keys fitted; one of the keys, with a little patient management, turned the lock. She looked in eagerly. There were open shelves above, and one long drawer under them. The shelves were devoted to specimens of curious minerals, neatly labeled and arranged. The drawer was divided into compartments. Two of the compartments contained papers. In the first, she discovered nothing but a collection of receipted bills. In the second, she found a heap of business documents; but the writing, yellow with age, was

enough of itself to warn her that the Trust was not there. She shut the doors of the cabinet, and, after locking them again with some little difficulty, proceeded to try the keys in the bookcase cupboards next, before she continued her investigations in the other rooms.

The bookcase cupboards were unassailable, the drawers and cupboards in all the other rooms were unassailable. One after another she tried them patiently in regular succession. It was useless. The chance which the cabinet in the library had offered in her favor was the first chance and the last.

She went back to her room, seeing nothing but her own gliding shadow, hearing nothing but her own stealthy footfall in the midnight stillness of the house. After mechanically putting the keys away in their former hiding-place, she looked toward her bed, and turned away from it, shuddering. The warning remembrance of what she had suffered that morning in the garden was vividly present to her mind. "Another chance tried," she thought to herself, "and another chance lost! I shall break down again if I think of it; and I shall think of it if I lie awake in the dark." She had brought a work-box with her to St. Crux, as one of the many little things which in her character of a servant it was desirable to possess; and she now opened the box and applied herself resolutely to work. Her want of dexterity with her needle assisted the object she had in view; it obliged her to pay the closest attention to her employment; it forced her thoughts away from the two subjects of all others which she now dreaded most--herself and the future.

The next day, as he had arranged, the admiral returned. His visit to London had not improved his spirits. The shadow of some unconquerable doubt still clouded his face; his restless tongue was strangely quiet, while Magdalen waited on him at his solitary meal. That night the snoring resounded once more on the inner side of the screen, and old Mazey was back again in the comfortless truckle-bed.

Three more days passed--April came. On the second of the month -- returning as unexpectedly as he had departed a week before--Mr. George Bartram re-appeared at St. Crux.

He came back early in the afternoon, and had an interview with his uncle in the library. The interview over, he left the house again, and was driven to the railway by the groom in time to catch the last train to London that night. The groom noticed, on the road, that "Mr. George seemed to be rather pleased than otherwise at leaving St. Crux." He also remarked, on his return, that the admiral swore at him for overdriving the horses--an

indication of ill-temper, on the part of his master, which he described as being entirely without precedent in all his former experience. Magdalen, in her department of service, had suffered in like manner under the old man's irritable humor: he had been dissatisfied with everything she did in the dining-room; and he had found fault with all the dishes, one after another, from the mutton-broth to the toasted cheese.

The next two days passed as usual. On the third day an event happened. In appearance, it was nothing more important than a ring at the drawing-room bell. In reality, it was the forerunner of approaching catastrophe--the formidable herald of the end.

It was Magdalen's business to answer the bell. On reaching the drawing-room door, she knocked as usual. There was no reply. After again knocking, and again receiving no answer, she ventured into the room, and was instantly met by a current of cold air flowing full on her face. The heavy sliding door in the opposite wall was pushed back, and the Arctic atmosphere of Freeze-your-Bones was pouring unhindered into the empty room.

She waited near the door, doubtful what to do next; it was certainly the drawing-room bell that had rung, and no other. She waited, looking through the open doorway opposite, down the wilderness of the dismantled Hall.

A little consideration satisfied her that it would be best to go downstairs again, and wait there for a second summons from the bell. On turning to leave the room, she happened to look back once more, and exactly at that moment she saw the door open at the opposite extremity of the Banqueting-Hall--the door leading into the first of the apartments in the east wing. A tall man came out, wearing his great coat and his hat, and rapidly approached the drawing-room. His gait betrayed him, while he was still too far off for his features to be seen. Before he was quite half-way across the Hall, Magdalen had recognized--the admiral.

He looked, not irritated only, but surprised as well, at finding his parlor-maid waiting for him in the drawing-room, and inquired, sharply and suspiciously, what she wanted there? Magdalen replied that she had come there to answer the bell. His face cleared a little when he heard the explanation. "Yes, yes; to be sure," he said. "I did ring, and then I forgot it." He pulled the sliding door back into its place as he spoke. "Coals," he resumed, impatiently, pointing to the empty scuttle. "I rang for coals."

Magdalen went back to the kitchen regions. After communicating the

admiral's order to the servant whose special duty it was to attend to the fires, she returned to the pantry, and, gently closing the door, sat down alone to think.

It had been her impression in the drawing-room--and it was her impression still--that she had accidentally surprised Admiral Bartram on a visit to the east rooms, which, for some urgent reason of his own, he wished to keep a secret. Haunted day and night by the one dominant idea that now possessed her, she leaped all logical difficulties at a bound, and at once associated the suspicion of a secret proceeding on the admiral's part with the kindred suspicion which pointed to him as the depository of the Secret Trust. Up to this time it had been her settled belief that he kept all his important documents in one or other of the suite of rooms which he happened to be occupying for the time being. Why--she now asked herself, with a sudden distrust of the conclusion which had hitherto satisfied her mind--why might he not lock some of them up in the other rooms as well? The remembrance of the keys still concealed in their hiding-place in her room sharpened her sense of the reasonableness of this new view. With one unimportant exception, those keys had all failed when she tried them in the rooms on the north side of the house. Might they not succeed with the cabinets and cupboards in the east rooms, on which she had never tried them, or thought of trying them, yet? If there was a chance, however small, of turning them to better account than she had turned them thus far, it was a chance to be tried. If there was a possibility, however remote, that the Trust might be hidden in any one of the locked repositories in the east wing, it was a possibility to be put to the test. When? Her own experience answered the question. At the time when no prying eyes were open, and no accidents were to be feared--when the house was quiet--in the dead of night.

She knew enough of her changed self to dread the enervating influence of delay. She determined to run the risk headlong that night.

More blunders escaped her when dinner-time came; the admiral's criticisms on her waiting at table were sharper than ever. His hardest words inflicted no pain on her; she scarcely heard him--her mind was dull to every sense but the sense of the coming trial. The evening which had passed slowly to her on the night of her first experiment with the keys passed quickly now. When bed-time came, bed-time took her by surprise.

She waited longer on this occasion than she had waited before. The admiral was at home; he might alter his mind and go downstairs again, after he had gone up to his room; he might have forgotten something in the library and might return to fetch it. Midnight struck from the clock in the servants' hall

before she ventured out of her room, with the keys again in her pocket, with the candle again in her hand.

At the first of the stairs on which she set her foot to descend, an all-mastering hesitation, an unintelligible shrinking from some peril unknown, seized her on a sudden. She waited, and reasoned with herself. She had recoiled from no sacrifices, she had yielded to no fears, in carrying out the stratagem by which she had gained admission to St. Crux; and now, when the long array of difficulties at the outset had been patiently conquered, now, when by sheer force of resolution the starting-point was gained, she hesitated to advance. "I shrank from nothing to get here," she said to herself. "What madness possesses me that I shrink now?"

Every pulse in her quickened at the thought, with an animating shame that nerved her to go on. She descended the stairs, from the third floor to the second, from the second to the first, without trusting herself to pause again within easy reach of her own room. In another minute, she had reached the end of the corridor, had crossed the vestibule, and had entered the drawing-room. It was only when her grasp was on the heavy brass handle of the sliding door--it was only at the moment before she pushed the door back--that she waited to take breath. The Banqueting-Hall was close on the other side of the wooden partition against which she stood; her excited imagination felt the death-like chill of it flowing over her already.

She pushed back the sliding door a few inches--and stopped in momentary alarm. When the admiral had closed it in her presence that day, she had heard no noise. When old Mazey had opened it to show her the rooms in the east wing, she had heard no noise. Now, in the night silence, she noticed for the first time that the door made a sound--a dull, rushing sound, like the wind.

She roused herself, and pushed it further back--pushed it halfway into the hollow chamber in the wall constructed to receive it. She advanced boldly into the gap, and met the night view of the Banqueting-Hall face to face.

The moon was rounding the southern side of the house. Her paling beams streamed through the nearer windows, and lay in long strips of slanting light on the marble pavement of the Hall. The black shadows of the pediments between each window, alternating with the strips of light, heightened the wan glare of the moonshine on the floor. Toward its lower end, the Hall melted mysteriously into darkness. The ceiling was lost to view; the yawning fire-place, the overhanging mantel-piece, the long row of battle pictures above, were all swallowed up in night. But one visible object

was discernible, besides the gleaming windows and the moon-striped floor. Midway in the last and furthest of the strips of light, the tripod rose erect on its gaunt black legs, like a monster called to life by the moon--a monster rising through the light, and melting invisibly into the upper shadows of the Hall. Far and near, all sound lay dead, drowned in the stagnant cold. The soothing hush of night was awful here. The deep abysses of darkness hid abysses of silence more immeasurable still.

She stood motionless in the door-way, with straining eyes, with straining ears. She looked for some moving thing, she listened for some rising sound, and looked and listened in vain. A quick ceaseless shivering ran through her from head to foot. The shivering of fear, or the shivering of cold? The bare doubt roused her resolute will. "Now," she thought, advancing a step through the door-way, "or never! I'll count the strips of moonlight three times over, and cross the Hall."

"One, two, three, four, five. One, two, three, four, five. One, two, three, four, five."

As the final number passed her lips at the third time of counting, she crossed the Hall. Looking for nothing, listening for nothing, one hand holding the candle, the other mechanically grasping the folds of her dress, she sped, ghost-like, down the length of the ghostly place. She reached the door of the first of the eastern rooms, opened it, and ran in. The sudden relief of attaining a refuge, the sudden entrance into a new atmosphere, overpowered her for the moment. She had just time to put the candle safely on a table before she dropped giddy and breathless into the nearest chair.

Little by little she felt the rest quieting her. In a few minutes she became conscious of the triumph of having won her way to the east rooms. In a few minutes she was strong enough to rise from the chair, to take the keys from her pocket, and to look round her.

The first objects of furniture in the room which attracted her attention were an old bureau of carved oak, and a heavy buhl table with a cabinet attached. She tried the bureau first; it looked the likeliest receptacle for papers of the two. Three of the keys proved to be of a size to enter the lock, but none of them would turn it. The bureau was unassailable. She left it, and paused to trim the wick of the candle before she tried the buhl cabinet next.

At the moment when she raised her hand to the candle, she heard the stillness of the Banqueting-Hall shudder with the terror of a sound--a sound

faint and momentary, like the distant rushing of the wind.

The sliding door in the drawing-room had moved.

Which way had it moved? Had an unknown hand pushed it back in its socket further than she had pushed it, or pulled it to again, and closed it? The horror of being shut out all night, by some undiscoverable agency, from the life of the house, was stronger in her than the horror of looking across the Banqueting-Hall. She made desperately for the door of the room.

It had fallen to silently after her when she had come in, but it was not closed. She pulled it open, and looked.

The sight that met her eyes rooted her, panic-stricken, to the spot.

Close to the first of the row of windows, counting from the drawing-room, and full in the gleam of it, she saw a solitary figure. It stood motionless, rising out of the furthest strip of moonlight on the floor. As she looked, it suddenly disappeared. In another instant she saw it again, in the second strip of moonlight--lost it again--saw it in the third strip--lost it once more--and saw it in the fourth. Moment by moment it advanced, now mysteriously lost in the shadow, now suddenly visible again in the light, until it reached the fifth and nearest strip of moonlight. There it paused, and strayed aside slowly to the middle of the Hall. It stopped at the tripod, and stood, shivering audibly in the silence, with its hands raised over the dead ashes, in the action of warming them at a fire. It turned back again, moving down the path of the moonlight, stopped at the fifth window, turned once more, and came on softly through the shadow straight to the place where Magdalen stood.

Her voice was dumb, her will was helpless. Every sense in her but the seeing sense was paralyzed. The seeing sense--held fast in the fetters of its own terror--looked unchangeably straightforward, as it had looked from the first. There she stood in the door-way, full in the path of the figure advancing on her through the shadow, nearer and nearer, step by step.

It came close.

The bonds of horror that held her burst asunder when it was within arm's-length. She started back. The light of the candle on the table fell full on its face, and showed her--Admiral Bartram.

A long, gray dressing-gown was wrapped round him. His head was

uncovered; his feet were bare. In his left hand he carried his little basket of keys. He passed Magdalen slowly, his lips whispering without intermission, his open eyes staring straight before him with the glassy stare of death. His eyes revealed to her the terrifying truth. He was walking in his sleep.

The terror of seeing him as she saw him now was not the terror she had felt when her eyes first lighted on him--an apparition in the moon-light, a specter in the ghostly Hall. This time she could struggle against the shock; she could feel the depth of her own fear.

He passed her, and stopped in the middle of the room. Magdalen ventured near enough to him to be within reach of his voice as he muttered to himself. She ventured nearer still, and heard the name of her dead husband fall distinctly from the sleep-walker's lips.

"Noel!" he said, in the low monotonous tones of a dreamer talking in his sleep, "my good fellow, Noel, take it back again! It worries me day and night. I don't know where it's safe; I don't know where to put it. Take it back, Noel--take it back!"

As those words escaped him, he walked to the buhl cabinet. He sat down in the chair placed before it, and searched in the basket among his keys. Magdalen softly followed him, and stood behind his chair, waiting with the candle in her hand. He found the key, and unlocked the cabinet. Without an instant's hesitation, he drew out a drawer, the second of a row. The one thing in the drawer was a folded letter. He removed it, and put it down before him on the table. "Take it back, Noel!" he repeated, mechanically; "take it back!"

Magdalen looked over his shoulder and read these lines, traced in her husband's handwriting, at the top of the letter: To be kept in your own possession, and to be opened by yourself only on the day of my decease. Noel Vanstone. She saw the words plainly, with the admiral's name and the admiral's address written under them.

The Trust within reach of her hand! The Trust traced to its hiding-place at last!

She took one step forward, to steal round his chair and to snatch the letter from the table. At the instant when she moved, he took it up once more, locked the cabinet, and, rising, turned and faced her.

In the impulse of the moment, she stretched out her hand toward the hand

in which he held the letter. The yellow candle-light fell full on him. The awful death-in-life of his face--the mystery of the sleeping body, moving in unconscious obedience to the dreaming mind--daunted her. Her hand trembled, and dropped again at her side.

He put the key of the cabinet back in the basket, and crossed the room to the bureau, with the basket in one hand and the letter in the other. Magdalen set the candle on the table again, and watched him. As he had opened the cabinet, so he now opened the bureau. Once more Magdalen stretched out her hand, and once more she recoiled before the mystery and the terror of his sleep. He put the letter in a drawer at the back of the bureau, and closed the heavy oaken lid again. "Yes," he said. "Safer there, as you say, Noel--safer there." So he spoke. So, time after time, the words that betrayed him revealed the dead man living and speaking again in the dream.

Had he locked the bureau? Magdalen had not heard the lock turn. As he slowly moved away, walking back once more toward the middle of the room, she tried the lid. It was locked. That discovery made, she looked to see what he was doing next. He was leaving the room again, with the basket of keys in his hand. When her first glance overtook him, he was crossing the threshold of the door.

Some inscrutable fascination possessed her, some mysterious attraction drew her after him, in spite of herself. She took up the candle and followed him mechanically, as if she too were walking in her sleep. One behind the other, in slow and noiseless progress, they crossed the Banqueting-Hall. One behind the other, they passed through the drawing-room, and along the corridor, and up the stairs. She followed him to his own door. He went in, and shut it behind him softly. She stopped, and looked toward the truckle-bed. It was pushed aside at the foot, some little distance away from the bedroom door. Who had moved it? She held the candle close and looked toward the pillow, with a sudden curiosity and a sudden doubt.

The truckle-bed was empty.

The discovery startled her for the moment, and for the moment only. Plain as the inferences were to be drawn from it, she never drew them. Her mind, slowly recovering the exercise of its faculties, was still under the influence of the earlier and the deeper impressions produced on it. Her mind followed the admiral into his room, as her body had followed him across the Banqueting-Hall.

Had he lain down again in his bed? Was he still asleep? She listened at the

door. Not a sound was audible in the room. She tried the door, and, finding it not locked, softly opened it a few inches and listened again. The rise and fall of his low, regular breathing instantly caught her ear. He was still asleep.

She went into the room, and, shading the candle-light with her hand, approached the bedside to look at him. The dream was past; the old man's sleep was deep and peaceful; his lips were still; his quiet hand was laid over the coverlet in motionless repose. He lay with his face turned toward the right-hand side of the bed. A little table stood there within reach of his hand. Four objects were placed on it; his candle, his matches, his customary night drink of lemonade, and his basket of keys.

The idea of possessing herself of his keys that night (if an opportunity offered when the basket was not in his hand) had first crossed her mind when she saw him go into his room. She had lost it again for the moment, in the surprise of discovering the empty truckle-bed. She now recovered it the instant the table attracted her attention. It was useless to waste time in trying to choose the one key wanted from the rest--the one key was not well enough known to her to be readily identified. She took all the keys from the table, in the basket as they lay, and noiselessly closed the door behind her on leaving the room.

The truckle-bed, as she passed it, obtruded itself again on her attention, and forced her to think of it. After a moment's consideration, she moved the foot of the bed back to its customary position across the door. Whether he was in the house or out of it, the veteran might return to his deserted post at any moment. If he saw the bed moved from its usual place, he might suspect something wrong, he might rouse his master, and the loss of the keys might be discovered.

Nothing happened as she descended the stairs, nothing happened as she passed along the corridor; the house was as silent and as solitary as ever. She crossed the Banqueting-Hall this time without hesitation; the events of the night had hardened her mind against all imaginary terrors. "Now, I have got it!" she whispered to herself, in an irrepressible outburst of exaltation, as she entered the first of the east rooms and put her candle on the top of the old bureau.

Even yet there was a trial in store for her patience. Some minutes elapsed--minutes that seemed hours--before she found the right key and raised the lid of the bureau. At last she drew out the inner drawer! At last she had the letter in her hand!

It had been sealed, but the seal was broken. She opened it on the spot, to make sure that she had actually possessed herself of the Trust before leaving the room. The end of the letter was the first part of it she turned to. It came to its conclusion high on the third page, and it was signed by Noel Vanstone. Below the name these lines were added in the admiral's handwriting:

"This letter was received by me at the same time with the will of my friend, Noel Vanstone. In the event of my death, without leaving any other directions respecting it, I beg my nephew and my executors to understand that I consider the requests made in this document as absolutely binding on me.

"ARTHUR EVERARD BARTRAM."

She left those lines unread. She just noticed that they were not in Noel Vanstone's handwriting; and, passing over them instantly, as immaterial to the object in view, turned the leaves of the letter, and transferred her attention to the opening sentences on the first page. She read these words:

"DEAR ADMIRAL BARTRAM--When you open my Will (in which you are named my sole executor), you will find that I have bequeathed the whole residue of my estate--after payment of one legacy of five thousand pounds--to yourself. It is the purpose of my letter to tell you privately what the object is for which I have left you the fortune which is now placed in your hands.

"I beg you to consider this large legacy as intended--"

She had proceeded thus far with breathless curiosity and interest, when her attention suddenly failed her. Something--she was too deeply absorbed to know what--had got between her and the letter. Was it a sound in the Banqueting-Hall again? She looked over her shoulder at the door behind her, and listened. Nothing was to be heard, nothing was to be seen. She returned to the letter.

The writing was cramped and close. In her impatient curiosity to read more, she failed to find the lost place again. Her eyes, attracted by a blot, lighted on a sentence lower in the page than the sentence at which she had left off. The first three words she saw riveted her attention anew--they were the first words she had met with in the letter which directly referred to George Bartram. In the sudden excitement of that discovery, she read the rest of the sentence eagerly, before she made any second attempt to return to the lost

place:

"If your nephew fails to comply with these conditions--that is to say, if, being either a bachelor or a widower at the time of my decease, he fails to marry in all respects as I have here instructed him to marry, within six calendar months from that time--it is my desire that he shall not receive--"

She had read to that point, to that last word and no further, when a hand passed suddenly from behind her between the letter and her eye, and gripped her fast by the wrist in an instant.

She turned with a shriek of terror, and found herself face to face with old Mazey.

The veteran's eyes were bloodshot; his hand was heavy; his list slippers were twisted crookedly on his feet; and his body swayed to and fro on his widely parted legs. If he had tested his condition that night by the unfailing criterion of the model ship, he must have inevitably pronounced sentence on himself in the usual form: "Drunk again, Mazey; drunk again."

"You young Jezebel!" said the old sailor, with a leer on one side of his face, and a frown on the other. "The next time you take to night-walking in the neighborhood of Freeze-your-Bones, use those sharp eyes of yours first, and make sure there's nobody else night walking in the garden outside. Drop it, Jezebel! drop it!"

Keeping fast hold of Magdalen's arm with one hand, he took the letter from her with the other, put it back into the open drawer, and locked the bureau. She never struggled with him, she never spoke. Her energy was gone; her powers of resistance were crushed. The terrors of that horrible night, following one close on the other in reiterated shocks, had struck her down at last. She yielded as submissively, she trembled as helplessly, as the weakest woman living.

Old Mazey dropped her arm, and pointed with drunken solemnity to a chair in an inner corner of the room. She sat down, still without uttering a word. The veteran (breathing very hard over it) steadied himself on both elbows against the slanting top of the bureau, and from that commanding position addressed Magdalen once more.

"Come and be locked up!" said old Mazey, wagging his venerable head with judicial severity. "There'll be a court of inquiry to-morrow morning, and I'm witness--worse luck!--I'm witness. You young jade, you've committed

burglary--that's what you've done. His honor the admiral's keys stolen; his honor the admiral's desk ransacked; and his honor the admiral's private letters broke open. Burglary! Burglary! Come and be locked up!" He slowly recovered an upright position, with the assistance of his hands, backed by the solid resisting power of the bureau; and lapsed into lachrymose soliloquy. "Who'd have thought it?" said old Mazey, paternally watering at the eyes. "Take the outside of her, and she's as straight as a poplar; take the inside of her, and she's as crooked as Sin. Such a fine-grown girl, too. What a pity! what a pity!"

"Don't hurt me!" said Magdalen, faintly, as old Mazey staggered up to the chair, and took her by the wrist again. "I'm frightened, Mr. Mazey--I'm dreadfully frightened."

"Hurt you?" repeated the veteran. "I'm a deal too fond of you--and more shame for me at my age!--to hurt you. If I let go of your wrist, will you walk straight before me, where I can see you all the way? Will you be a good girl, and walk straight up to your own door?"

Magdalen gave the promise required of her--gave it with an eager longing to reach the refuge of her room. She rose, and tried to take the candle from the bureau, but old Mazey's cunning hand was too quick for her. "Let the candle be," said the veteran, winking in momentary forgetfulness of his responsible position. "You're a trifle quicker on your legs than I am, my dear, and you might leave me in the lurch, if I don't carry the light."

They returned to the inhabited side of the house. Staggering after Magdalen, with the basket of keys in one hand and the candle in the other, old Mazey sorrowfully compared her figure with the straightness of the poplar, and her disposition with the crookedness of Sin, all the way across "Freeze-your-Bones," and all the way upstairs to her own door. Arrived at that destination, he peremptorily refused to give her the candle until he had first seen her safely inside the room. The conditions being complied with, he resigned the light with one hand, and made a dash with the other at the key, drew it from the inside of the lock, and instantly closed the door. Magdalen heard him outside chuckling over his own dexterity, and fitting the key into the lock again with infinite difficulty. At last he secured the door, with a deep grunt of relief. "There she is safe!" Magdalen heard him say, in regretful soliloquy. "As fine a girl as ever I sat eyes on. What a pity! what a pity!"

The last sounds of his voice died out in the distance; and she was left alone in her room.

Holding fast by the banister, old Mazey made his way down to the corridor on the second floor, in which a night light was always burning. He advanced to the truckle-bed, and, steadying himself against the opposite wall, looked at it attentively. Prolonged contemplation of his own resting-place for the night apparently failed to satisfy him. He shook his head ominously, and, taking from the side-pocket of his great-coat a pair of old patched slippers, surveyed them with an aspect of illimitable doubt. "I'm all abroad to-night," he mumbled to himself. "Troubled in my mind--that's what it is--troubled in my mind."

The old patched slippers and the veteran's existing perplexities happened to be intimately associated one with the other, in the relation of cause and effect. The slippers belonged to the admiral, who had taken one of his unreasonable fancies to this particular pair, and who still persisted in wearing them long after they were unfit for his service. Early that afternoon old Mazey had taken the slippers to the village cobbler to get them repaired on the spot, before his master called for them the next morning; he sat superintending the progress and completion of the work until evening came, when he and the cobbler betook themselves to the village inn to drink each other's healths at parting. They had prolonged this social ceremony till far into the night, and they had parted, as a necessary consequence, in a finished and perfect state of intoxication on either side.

If the drinking-bout had led to no other result than those night wanderings in the grounds of St. Crux, which had shown old Mazey the light in the east windows, his memory would unquestionably have presented it to him the next morning in the aspect of one of the praiseworthy achievements of his life. But another consequence had sprung from it, which the old sailor now saw dimly, through the interposing bewilderment left in his brain by the drink. He had committed a breach of discipline, and a breach of trust. In plainer words, he had deserted his post.

The one safeguard against Admiral Bartram's constitutional tendency to somnambulism was the watch and ward which his faithful old servant kept outside his door. No entreaties had ever prevailed on him to submit to the usual precaution taken in such cases. He peremptorily declined to be locked into his room; he even ignored his own liability, whenever a dream disturbed him, to walk in his sleep. Over and over again, old Mazey had been roused by the admiral's attempts to push past the truckle-bed, or to step over it, in his sleep; and over and over again, when the veteran had reported the fact the next morning, his master had declined to believe him. As the old sailor now stood, staring in vacant inquiry at the bed-chamber door, these incidents of the past rose confusedly on his memory, and forced on him the

serious question whether the admiral had left his room during the earlier hours of the night. If by any mischance the sleep-walking fit had seized him, the slippers in old Mazey's hand pointed straight to the conclusion that followed--his master must have passed barefoot in the cold night over the stone stairs and passages of St. Crux. "Lord send he's been quiet!" muttered old Mazey, daunted, bold as he was and drunk as he was, by the bare contemplation of that prospect. "If his honor's been walking to-night, it will be the death of him!"

He roused himself for the moment by main force--strong in his dog-like fidelity to the admiral, though strong in nothing else--and fought off the stupor of the drink. He looked at the bed with steadier eyes and a clearer mind. Magdalen's precaution in returning it to its customary position presented it to him necessarily in the aspect of a bed which had never been moved from its place. He next examined the counterpane carefully. Not the faintest vestige appeared of the indentation which must have been left by footsteps passing over it. There was the plain evidence before him--the evidence recognizable at last by his own bewildered eyes--that the admiral had never moved from his room.

"I'll take the Pledge to-morrow!" mumbled old Mazey, in an outburst of grateful relief. The next moment the fumes of the liquor floated back insidiously over his brain; and the veteran, returning to his customary remedy, paced the passage in zigzag as usual, and kept watch on the deck of an imaginary ship.

Soon after sunrise, Magdalen suddenly heard the grating of the key from outside in the lock of the door. The door opened, and old Mazey re-appeared on the threshold. The first fever of his intoxication had cooled, with time, into a mild, penitential glow. He breathed harder than ever, in a succession of low growls, and wagged his venerable head at his own delinquencies without intermission.

"How are you now, you young land-shark in petticoats?" inquired the old sailor. "Has your conscience been quiet enough to let you go to sleep?"

"I have not slept," said Magdalen, drawing back from him in doubt of what he might do next. "I have no remembrance of what happened after you locked the door--I think I must have fainted. Don't frighten me again, Mr. Mazey! I feel miserably weak and ill. What do you want?"

"I want to say something serious," replied old Mazey, with impenetrable solemnity. "It's been on my mind to come here and make a clean breast of it,

for the last hour or more. Mark my words, young woman. I'm going to disgrace myself."

Magdalen drew further and further back, and looked at him in rising alarm.

"I know my duty to his honor the admiral," proceeded old Mazey, waving his hand drearily in the direction of his master's door. "But, try as hard as I may, I can't find it in my heart, you young jade, to be witness against you. I liked the make of you (especially about the waist) when you first came into the house, and I can't help liking the make of you still--though you have committed burglary, and though you are as crooked as Sin. I've cast the eyes of indulgence on fine-grown girls all my life, and it's too late in the day to cast the eyes of severity on 'em now. I'm seventy-seven, or seventy-eight, I don't rightly know which. I'm a battered old hulk, with my seams opening, and my pumps choked, and the waters of Death powering in on me as fast as they can. I'm as miserable a sinner as you'll meet with anywhere in these parts--Thomas Nagle, the cobbler, only excepted; and he's worse than I am, for he's the younger of the two, and he ought to know better. But the long and short or it is, I shall go down to my grave with an eye of indulgence for a fine-grown girl. More shame for me, you young Jezebel--more shame for me!"

The veteran's unmanageable eyes began to leer again in spite of him, as he concluded his harangue in these terms: the last reserves of austerity left in his face entrenched themselves dismally round the corners of his mouth. Magdalen approached him again, and tried to speak. He solemnly motioned her back with another dreary wave of his hand.

"No carneying!" said old Mazey; "I'm bad enough already, without that. It's my duty to make my report to his honor the admiral, and I will make it. But if you like to give the house the slip before the burglary's reported, and the court of inquiry begins, I'll disgrace myself by letting you go. It's market morning at Ossory, and Dawkes will be driving the light cart over in a quarter of an hour's time. Dawkes will take you if I ask him. I know my duty--my duty is to turn the key on you, and see Dawkes damned first. But I can't find it in my heart to be hard on a fine girl like you. It's bred in the bone, and it wunt come out of the flesh. More shame for me, I tell you again--more shame for me!"

The proposal thus strangely and suddenly presented to her took Magdalen completely by surprise. She had been far too seriously shaken by the events of the night to be capable of deciding on any subject at a moment's notice. "You are very good to me, Mr. Mazey," she said. "May I have a minute by

myself to think?"

"Yes, you may," replied the veteran, facing about forthwith and leaving the room. "They're all alike," proceeded old Mazey, with his head still running on the sex. "Whatever you offer 'em, they always want something more. Tall and short, native and foreign, sweethearts and wives, they're all alike!"

Left by herself, Magdalen reached her decision with far less difficulty than she had anticipated.

If she remained in the house, there were only two courses before her--to charge old Mazey with speaking under the influence of a drunken delusion, or to submit to circumstances. Though she owed to the old sailor her defeat in the very hour of success, his consideration for her at that moment forbade the idea of defending herself at his expense--even supposing, what was in the last degree improbable, that the defense would be credited. In the second of the two cases (the case of submission to circumstances), but one result could be expected--instant dismissal, and perhaps discovery as well. What object was to be gained by braving that degradation--by leaving the house publicly disgraced in the eyes of the servants who had hated and distrusted her from the first? The accident which had literally snatched the Trust from her possession when she had it in her hand was irreparable. The one apparent compensation under the disaster--in other words, the discovery that the Trust actually existed, and that George Bartram's marriage within a given time was one of the objects contained in it--was a compensation which could only be estimated at its true value by placing it under the light of Mr. Loscombe's experience. Every motive of which she was conscious was a motive which urged her to leave the house secretly while the chance was at her disposal. She looked out into the passage, and called softly to old Mazey to come back.

"I accept your offer thankfully, Mr. Mazey," she said. "You don't know what hard measure you dealt out to me when you took that letter from my hand. But you did your duty, and I can be grateful to you for sparing me this morning, hard as you were upon me last night. I am not such a bad girl as you think me--I am not, indeed."

Old Mazey dismissed the subject with another dreary wave of his hand.

"Let it be," said the veteran; "let it be! It makes no difference, my girl, to such an old rascal as I am. If you were fifty times worse than you are, I should let you go all the same. Put on your bonnet and shawl, and come along. I'm a disgrace to myself and a warning to others--that's what I am. No

luggage, mind! Leave all your rattle-traps behind you: to be overhauled, if necessary, at his honor the admiral's discretion. I can be hard enough on your boxes, you young Jezebel, if I can't be hard on you."

With these words, old Mazey led the way out of the room. "The less I see of her the better--especially about the waist," he said to himself, as he hobbled downstairs with the help of the banisters.

The cart was standing in the back yard when they reached the lower regions of the house, and Dawkes (otherwise the farm-bailiff's man) was fastening the last buckle of the horse's harness. The hoar-frost of the morning was still white in the shade. The sparkling points of it glistened brightly on the shaggy coats of Brutus and Cassius, as they idled about the yard, waiting, with steaming mouths and slowly wagging tails, to see the cart drive off. Old Mazey went out alone and used his influence with Dawkes, who, staring in stolid amazement, put a leather cushion on the cart-seat for his fellow-traveler. Shivering in the sharp morning air, Magdalen waited, while the preliminaries of departure were in progress, conscious of nothing but a giddy bewilderment of thought, and a helpless suspension of feeling. The events of the night confused themselves hideously with the trivial circumstances passing before her eyes in the courtyard. She started with the sudden terror of the night when old Mazey re-appeared to summon her out to the cart. She trembled with the helpless confusion of the night when the veteran cast the eyes of indulgence on her for the last time, and gave her a kiss on the cheek at parting. The next minute she felt him help her into the cart, and pat her on the back. The next, she heard him tell her in a confidential whisper that, sitting or standing, she was as straight as a poplar either way. Then there was a pause, in which nothing was said, and nothing done; and then the driver took the reins in hand and mounted to his place.

She roused herself at the parting moment and looked back. The last sight she saw at St. Crux was old Mazey wagging his head in the courtyard, with his fellow-profligates, the dogs, keeping time to him with their tails. The last words she heard were the words in which the veteran paid his farewell tribute to her charms:

"Burglary or no burglary," said old Mazey, "she's a fine-grown girl, if ever there was a fine one yet. What a pity! what a pity!"

THE END OF THE SEVENTH SCENE.